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Holding Up the Hills

HOLDING UP THE HILLS

The Biography of a Neighborhood

by

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*of the Congregation
of Holy Cross*

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I
BORN IN A FIELD

CHAPTER I

Gather in the Cows, Now

COMING down the dusty road afly summer day fifty years ago, and forty and thirty years ago, was The Granger, the most famous man we ever had in the neighborhood. He asked nothing on an ordinary day but room; yet he needed much of this, for he was a heavy thick man, and he came on with a kind of rolling motion. He was short and had a squared-off nose and face, and the bare parts of him, hands and face and neck, were splotched red and yellow—a kind of sorrel color.

His family was twice transplanted, first to Ontario and then to Iowa, and it was on our side of the water and among us that this son was born. At the outbreak of the Famines his parents came from the old country, they and at least one grandmother whom some of the neighbors called Nan and some called Aunt Kitty. Beyond the following story, none of us knows anything of her now. A neighbor boy was at first weak in the heart and later was supposed to be losing an eye, and she came and cured him by poulticing the eye and the heart with fresh cow dung.

That might be the way with her and in part with the parents, but The Granger was of a later time and of our place. They were Irish refugees looking for a way to live, whereas he was not consciously Irish at all. Of course, he was Irish in look, with the yellow and red and sandy head, and the blue eyes that appeared white because of the spare colorless brows; and he had a big head topping off the compact body.

That was his look, a point about which he never bothered. What he set out to be was the successful farmer in Iowa, and this is what he became. It was in that capacity, above all, that the neighborhood knew him.

I saw him once on an August day lying on the baked ground where men threshed. He was forty, and already the rich man of the community; at the moment he was waiting for his wagon, equipped with double side-boards, to be loaded with grain, since the field was his and was only rented on shares to a neighbor. The father ahead of him had been like that, too, a strong, short and heavy man, and he knew how to get his hands on good land, and to trade in cattle and mules; but, smart as he was, he was no match for his son.

It is not true that The Granger never went to school, but he never went much. "Three winters," I have often heard, was all he had, and that is about all the farm boy of the time had. Whatever we say of that training, we have to say that not many were then babied, and the hands and feet of boys and girls were calloused winter and summer. This boy picked up what he knew, and spoke an effective if unsubdued and horsey language. The thing is that he knew what he wanted to say, and he said it. Once in later years he was kept sick on the porch and counted the cars as a train pulled by; he told a friend that it had over seventy "head"; and the last time I visited him he said it was too bad about the tragic death of a young woman: "Too bad," he said simply; "she was such a smooth-turned little thing." I knew that this word was taken from the fields and lots and was what the scientists mean by finish and conformation in a horse.

He learned to read and write, knew quite well how to speak his mind, and by the practice of judging corn and mules and colts he became quick at figures, though at that he would rather lump stuff off than put it over the scales. The more fancy things were out of his line. His sisters paid attention to some of the graces; as far back as 1893, the younger ones wrote bits of verse, in an elegant hand, into the memory books of neighbor girls; one became a teacher, and I know that she and another always spoke with precision and polish. Well, let them; the big man of the house had work to do in the fields.

Any child in any family, unless he was an omathon, would find out by hard knocks. The Granger himself was one of ten children, five big boys and five big girls, one of the girls much taller than himself and one of them certainly as broad. They all learned to work, boys and girls. As a matter of fact, they were a byword in the community and looked upon in many ways as the model; what they did and as they did—that was the way to succeed.

There was not a drone among them. The boys were into the harness, whipped into it, an old neighbor used to say, and at twelve or thirteen were tugging away at men's loads. They were thick-chested and full-limbed, and they were well fed and evidently thrived on the work. The week was at least six days, and the summer day never less than twelve hours. One of the boys, Jahneen, must really have been undersized for a few years in his boyhood, since he wore the diminutive form of the name most of his life, and some of the oldtimers claimed that he had been puny and scrawny; they said he had "*the onreough* on him," a corrupted Gaelic word meaning a physical crookedness and sickliness; but if he once had that on him, he outgrew it and he has worn like iron. The big father, in spite of his strength, died in his sixties, of the heart. I recall the mother much better, a gray, frownish little old woman, dressed in her black sunbonnet, and long skirts, and some kind of gray-black calico waist brought in tightly around her lean body. To some of us it seems now that in her last years she just kept puttering around, always after ducks and geese.

As is the way with the Irish in this country, no son or daughter of this house was in any hurry to get married, though the big daughters were clearly made by nature to bear children. It would have been odd if The Granger had taken to girls, himself as solid and chubby as a fed-out steer and with a knowledge of the merit of every mule for miles out; it is ten to one he never thought of marriage: he was too busy, and it was around him that the

fortune, already big, was made by father and mother and all of them to grow. As for his sisters, they worked. All day they baked and pumped and weeded and sewed, they made carpets as all farm women did then, and picked and dried apples and threshed the beans; yet, so far as I know from general hearsay, they never plowed or husked or did anything that was considered men's work. The mother was the thrifty one. Toward the middle of the afternoon, she would call the girls from kitchen and garden. She'd say, "Ye'd better gather in the cows now, little girls." It was this little old one that cracked the whip and set the pace, though any of the five girls was two or three times as big as herself; she a short wispeen and each of them tall and a couple of them chunky. She was so provident and looked so carefully to things that people used to repeat her saying, "Anything is better than the buying."

How did this big son come to be called "The Granger"? No one knows now; all we know is that it started at our house, where we certainly did not know the precise meaning of the word; in our family code, it appeared to fit the man, and if he had ever heard it I am sure he would have appreciated it. He was never the niggardly little man, but hearty and openhanded, and we would have been delighted to call him "a good *flatul*," meaning big and generous and noble; but among us this Irish word had come to be applied only to women; certainly his sisters qualified for it. One of the boys had from the custom of the mother and through her from many neighbors a name that if spelt would be Paw-ge-wore, with a slight accent on the first syllable and much more on the last.

At The Granger's house they were all big strong people, but he was the sufficient and complete man, and they all looked to him and never he to them. What he said and what he did was law to them and to much of the community. People knew his judgment was right; that is to say, on matters with which he dealt, such as corn and steer calves and mule colts; when he spoke on any of these, nothing more was to be said.

He was rough and knotty and thick set, an insistent person, a kind of moving hill. When he moved, something gave. It is not true at all that we children were afraid of him, but we kept a step beyond the reach of his short fat arms and made room for him. He had the power, and we knew he meant business; no fooling, and no delay. We noticed what the neighbors' words and reactions made of him, and we saw that everybody came to say, and partly in seriousness, "You'd better watch out for that man!"

As a rule he came along in the morning, on horseback and without a saddle. "Good morning!" he used to roar, and stop the horse or mule so abruptly as almost to land the animal on its haunches. His greeting was like one word, one sudden breath: "G'morn!" Likely he had any news that was going, especially after the people had got phones, and he breezed it out, but at that he was a man of few words and never wasted time in talk. On a raw day he might shout only a word or two: "A little winter-y!" On a wet morning he'd be as blithe and fresh as a boy, as if the rain did him good. "Um-hum," he'd say with all the appearance of enjoying mud. "That *was* a rain. A good two inches, I 'spect, out on the flat. But I just figure it'll shine again before noon." Then he'd say he had "to beat on in: they'll be waiting dinner," though it was not yet much past ten.

And what he said, stuck in our minds; it counted, and at noon, people would repeat his words: it was The Granger said it, going by at such an hour, on the black colt he got from Ullum. Casual as the words might be, they stood, and no one ever thought of asking him to take any of them back.

On a summer morning he would always rein in to greet our mother, who was just his own age, and we liked him for that. Of course, he didn't take time to slide down from the horse's back where he would sprawl as if he were on the floor or the ground. "Just seen you churning there," he'd say, "and t'ought I'd ask how everything was. . . . Quite a windfall last night, by the way I see apples down

under yer little trees. . . . Ye'es, it's a loss; too bad." By that time he was off for home and saying over his shoulder, "Gosh, yes—hot!—hottest I've ever knowed it in June."

He was up with the birds in the morning, and something of the vigor and strength of morning was in his tone and manner. As a general thing, he was about his business before sun-up, and was himself like the broad new day. Nothing short of a wake could keep him out at night, and probably he was never absent from his bed at midnight in his life. At his house no need to spike the clock to keep up with the daylight. On Sundays he pulled on a white shirt—in the old days without collar, as is the Irish custom—and his black suit and a rancher's hat, and went half an hour ahead of time to the first Mass; and if people wanted to catch him, they knew they would have to nab him before church started, as he would come down the hill afterwards like a truck and get away on them.

In handling crops and in trading cattle, The Granger was the early bird. His corn was the first in the neighborhood to go into the ground, and if it set in cold and rainy, he would have it disked up and replanted before other good farmers got into their fields; and his corn was always two or three weeks out of the way of the first frost.

He was a quick buyer, too. If he got wind in the evening of a string of mules or a herd of dry cows for sale, the owner would find him at sunrise stalking around among the stuff and ready with a bid on them: just one bid, and the man could take it or leave it. What gave him a running start, besides, was that he always had cash in his jeans. But he was not the best seller; sometimes he let loose too soon because of his tendency to speed and promptness.

He knew how to get things done, and that was to go ahead and do them. No day was ever spent in making up his mind. Once he told a hand they were to drive cattle the next day: "Good and airy, too," he said. At two-thirty The Granger had the man out of bed, the breakfast was steaming on the table, and the horses saddled and busy at their oats. (The hand, a lean dark man, has survived

and still tells the story; he says that when they had driven fat cattle five miles and were nearly home again, people were only getting up; the hand was sent then to the fields to cut hedge, but slept in the shade till noon.) Quite naturally, this rustling Granger was little if any good along toward what he called the heel of the evening: his hours were from four to four.

Anyone would guess that this big urgent man never went far from home. As an old man who knew The Granger from birth to death has said, "Why should he go far?" The fact is that he had plenty of work and friends and hopes close to home. His cattle were what we call quick-fed; that is, they were kept with their noses into troughs full of corn; then they were sold from the lots and were delivered to a neighboring town. But he never shipped to Chicago, and much less did he ever go to any such place. His own big farms and the roads among them—that was far enough for him. It is safe to say that he was never out of the county except when he went, once or twice, to the state fair.

His usual way of travel was on a horse or a mule. He trotted out at most to a two or three hours' radius, and by the middle of the afternoon he was turning his horse for home. So the wretched little distance he went must seem to our age small; yet within the limits set by himself and by circumstances—the father was like that before him—he came and went as a remarkably free man, and no reasonable person could have felt that the man was tied up or shut into a pen or a box. He knew barns and lots and fields and the outsides of people's houses and a few roads. Except on Sunday mornings, he seldom went into our little town itself, and the only business he had in the county seat, twenty miles off, was to pay his taxes, and he could get that done by proxy. When cars had been well tried he got a model-T, and his brother drove it for him; it wore down and at last they removed the top, and still they drove the car, the big man filling up the back seat and leaning forward to shout orders and observations about

hay and corn and pigs. He was more at home on a horse or in a wagon, but even in the car he remained free and would have served well as the picture of Man, Lord of the Machine. When cars had become common, he went down the road one day on a horse and stopped to talk to a neighbor driving a car that was mostly hand-made. The neighbor said the car worked well but heated up so quickly that he had to keep it all the time in low. The Granger said, "Why, I understand that is just what makes them heat up!" It was hearsay with him, and he merely knew the words.

There he was, a big hearty man, full to the brim, in a neighborhood that knew and needed to know little of what occurred outside, and in a family that was as independent as a family can be of the neighborhood. Yet he was big-hearted, too, and a good neighbor, and not all of his plain speech and direct action was confined to wheat and cattle. Pounding at the earth for over sixty years and things coming his way, it was still true that he felt for others. "Gosh!" he'd say when news came of a poor neighbor's injury or sickness. "All these summers so short on crops, and now laid up with a broken leg. He's had it hard, and that's the way it is with him now. Poor fellow!" And he gave money for anyone who was out of luck, though he was never the one to pass the hat; he didn't want to show off, in this or any matter, and I saw him get a little sore once when his brother seemed to him to be bragging about how a team could pull. He sent nephews and sometimes even nieces away to school for a year or two; but he could well afford it, since he had a dozen farms and always paid cash for cattle: not checks or notes but gold; he rammed a big hairy blistered hand into the side pocket of the jeans that fit to him like paper on the wall, and he came up with the money; and once as I and an orphan boy rode with him on the seat of a wagon, the man's side of the spring flattened, I saw him give the boy a silver dollar—and to a small boy then in the country a dollar was a fortune.

After all, trade was not the top thing in the world. People were above trade, and in a vague yet assured way God and a man's soul had first place. The big man, into cattle and land, prayed. A small boy leading the stacker horse for him, supposed The Granger did not know a word of prayer, but says he saw him run off the stack blessing himself when a blade of lightning split the sky. And an old hand tells the same sort of story. He says that every night during Lent one of the girls would begin to lead the beads, kneeling bolt upright on the kitchen floor; Jahneen was willing to be in bed and would say with a groan, "Come on, boys, it's the tug of war," but The Granger answered his Hail Marys with no sign of fuss.

What was not in him or any of his people was to be mean or tight about anything. Whatever they did, they did with heartiness and generosity, at work, at their meals or in neighboring. They had a big farm, then more and more farms; they fed carloads of beef cattle and whole lots of red and black hogs (they cut off the pig's tail the first day of his life, for it was a saying that it takes a bushel of corn to fatten a hog's tail); their orchard was the biggest we then knew of, but they never sold apples, they merely wanted plenty, and after that the neighbors were welcome to come and get well-filled sacks of them. It was a great place to help thresh, for everything seemed to be provided, and a man older than The Granger says the main farm was like a small town. It was the place to visit, and we children were allowed to take turns going there in summer, and we always came home with a good sack of apples over the mare's back.

The man surely had his faults, though children would not know of them. For one thing, they say he had a temper, a furious gale when it broke out; he would not fight directly then with men but with the elements: they say he used to throw off his rag of a felt hat and stomp it into the earth. This is likely enough, and we must say that at any rate he was never flabby.

After having had the bull so long by the horns, this man

has had to yield. A friend has written, "There's the man that's broken down; you ought to stop and see him." It would be hard to go to see The Granger when he had not everything in hand, when even so little a thing as his breathing came hard, and anyone would say it is a pity he could not have gone to the end on a horse or a mule and have finished at a trot: no stories of being stove' up, no stories of the old cattle traders and mule men coming to see him and not being allowed to talk to him, and himself at last not allowed to talk to them. No, indeed, I shall not go. I have not the heart even to think that he may really be broken down, after his seventy-five years of untameable youth, of having his head, as they say of horses.

My Share from the Flat Bottle

Not a little old man, but the curved shell of a man who must have been tall and fairly broad and always lean. People would hesitate to say he was ever neat or trim or handy or quick. And he was not in his best days—"any day ever"—a strong man, though at that he runs up close to ninety, and at last is just bones and a live-wire of a mind lying in the bed. There he jokes and takes the end calmly, merely saying that he is down for good, and another old man tells the truth when he says the lean one is as big a liar as ever.

This lean man was not born here, as The Granger was and as nearly everyone now in the neighborhood was. He was born in Ontario, and came to Iowa by ox team with his people, and with half a dozen other families, in the summer of '54. He and The Granger were neighbors for nearly eighty years; they were cousins, too, and the county land records show that this man's mother bought land from the other's father on September 18, 1858, and that his father sold land to The Granger's father the same day; this, of course, was a trade in land. But in a sense it is true to say they were never cousins, or neighbors either, for one of them took to the life of trade and land and cattle wholeheartedly, and the other saw that life as casual and almost as unreal: he didn't believe in it. One of them was a rich cattleman, the other was always a poor man whose poverty nevertheless had to be studied if it was to be seen, the man himself shone out so clearly through it.

Once when I visited him, he was in the yard minding a pair of boys, two of his many great-grandchildren. "You go on into the house," he said; "I'll have to wait with these lads. I wish she'd mind them herself. But I'll be in,

kids and all, as soon as I finish this chew." He sat on an upturned box, and had a twig of slippery elm, with tattered leaves on it, in his hand.

That makeshift, that nearly total lack of equipment was like him. He was simple, in the sense of free and uncomplicated, and he needed only a little, then and always; he wanted only simple food, a bare kind of house, one tolerable suit, one pair of shoes, a dubious stub of a pipe, no great stack of money, but just enough cash showing to take care of him and his family. Everything about him was plain, because he was plain; he didn't know about make-up and make-believe. What he knew was how to be exactly himself. More than any other person I have ever seen he made clear man's fundamental independence of things; without any suggestion of strain, he allowed just the required tribute to what was external to himself and his friends and people.

That was the way of the man. But as for his makeshift piece of land, that is a different question. It was as poor a farm as anyone could name; it was not well managed, and probably he never had a clear title to it, such as it was. He worked vigorously and made a living. The more well-to-do people would say and likely some of them did say that he got nowhere. In a way, what they said was true. He certainly worked. Dawn saw him in the fields, wearing down the clay of his poor hills into ridges and ditches; soon after four in the afternoon he was coming home to supper, and at seven-thirty of a summer evening he had had a pipeful or two of long-green and was turning into bed. The family might have been unlucky and what is called a long-tailed family, for there were seven daughters in it, but it also had three or four sons. Some daughter or other had to be up at four o'clock no matter where he lived and what he did, and get him his cup of coffee; and he would not put up with delay. In his anger at such a circumstance, his tone was deeper and his speech slower, and always the tone was deep and the movement of his language slow.

In our part of the country, most of the land is poor: hills, ditches, and third-rate timber. This man's land was as poor as any. The farm was an eighty of hillsides. The foothills and just one hill, well known to us as the Big Hill, were fit for the plow, and even the north side of that hill ran into brush, into hazel and running-oak and a second crop of hickory. That side would have been hard to plow, but the soil would not have been bad, at least when first farmed. The man did not trouble himself about it; instead he kept for years to the clear but poor areas, and we never saw his plowed land when it would have raised a big crop of anything. The problem with that kind of thin land, on the hillsides, is that under a heavy rain along in May and early June the soil itself goes off in streams. What is left then is bleached sub-soil, and gulleys. Poor, shallow soil in the first place, and always getting shallower with use. Ditches take their toll of it at the outset, and keep eating into it. An empty creek gashed this man's land crookedly from the southwest corner nearly to the north east.

Well, it is easy to see what sort of crop-land he had in his keeping, once we allow for brush and thin sour points and ditches and the creek. Even so, he worked and was a happy man.

He plowed and milked, and sometimes he fed a little and sold calves or pigs, though most years he sold the corn direct from the field as he husked it. Now what some people would say was that in spite of his labor, he was shiftless. This could only mean that he was not the best manager or was no great hand for making money; he was never born to be a business man. By staying at it, he created food and some rags of clothes for the boys and the many daughters. The wife, who was famous for "policy," watched things closely, things about the house and anything that got into the limp little purse. She knew how to stretch the bit they had. The man himself was intelligent, there's no doubt about that; and she was, as they say, as

smart as a whip. With his work and her work and her eye, they managed.

As a matter of fact, the children were, taken all in all, as keen and lively a brood as ever grew up in our neighborhood. Everyone of them had some of her "policy" and most of them very soon learned to work. But allow them health, and cleverness and their great friendliness—which they had from both sides; still they lacked a necessary rural thing; not one of them had any love for the land. They fled from it, one, two, three at a time, and once they had taken hand from the plow they never longed to put hand to it again. There is not in any of their bones today any aching for the soil. The truth is, the man himself, born we might say in a field and patching up a farm for sixty weary years, had no feeling for land. Soon left with the children to look after, he was close only to them and to a few neighbors and to his span of old white horses, the one land-thing he loved; he harrowed and weeded and threshed as a kind of formality and only to get through the winter.

He had good judgment on men, none at all on cattle. At a sale, he talked to anyone near him, and missed the bargain in a mule colt or a pen of shoats; really he had very little interest in bargains: that was not his line. It is true he had to make a living, but he did it not by trade but by knocking it out of a stubborn patch of earth. Then with the living more or less secured he was no longer interested even in that, but only in life and in people.

He was a better friend than farmer; a family man, not a plowman or stockman. We might say he was a humanist, in the best sense of this word; one who understands and loves people; he was a country gentleman who worked hard and never had money.

What he could put his heart into was some simple little game, at home or near home. He played horseshoes, sweeping the shoe up from near the ground, his eye dead on the peg. The local horse races attracted him, as they did everybody, but his main interest there was in people and a nip, along with friends, out of a bottle; when he got a little of

something into him, he laughed easily but not loudly. He saw his chances quickly, and made up jokes. When a big heavy man, a great panther of a Connaughtman, got angry and wanted to fight, the lean man won by saying at once that he himself would have to reduce seventy pounds, so as to avoid the charge of manslaughter. Once when he was very old a bum came to him where he sat on the porch on a summer morning lacing his shoes. The bum asked for some breakfast. "Gad," said the old man, looking as if he had slept on the porch, "that's just what I was going to go looking for, myself!"

He liked a game of euchre or forty-five, in the long afternoons of the off-season when he was not busy. He was always deaf and toward the last he was forgetful and his eye was not quick, but he heard the bids and caught the signals (the local euchre players all use signals: "right" and "left"); he knew which cards were out, and he never trumped a partner's ace. Of course, he cut the cards, not that he was suspicious but, as the people say, "just in case"; and he boxed them on an opponent. One evening I dealt myself a 'lone twice straight in six-hand, and as we wound up the game he seemed a little hurt as if he felt he had been tricked in some way: it was a good thing he was not convinced outright of it. And once he took me for partner when he had been winning all day in forty-five, and from that hand he lost. In the local word, his luck deserted him. But in general, it was much luckier to play with him than against him.

The lean man could never have gone to school very long or taken it with great seriousness. For one thing, when he was a boy in the 'sixties, it wasn't the custom. The terms themselves were short and broken. And this man believed little enough in the discipline of such things as numbers and written words. It is true there were, now and then, spelling schools and writing and singing schools: special little courses poorly organized; a sort of travelling master would happen along and conduct one of these, but boys and girls attended more for the sake of the social

gathering than for any possible learning. Some of them, however, did learn; they came to write a distinguished old-fashioned hand and formal old-fashioned letters; and they learnt to spell and almost couldn't be spelt down; my own mother could spell any word she had ever seen in print. But the lean man had his own hand, his own orthography, and his own informal style of letter.

By good chance, his people have a dozen of his letters which are as genuine as earth. He wrote as he thought and was, and, even down to the spelling, just as he spoke—and, as the letters themselves show, he was a good talker; every letter of every word is well formed, perfectly clear and firm, and some words are printed; two words, such as "a few," are sometimes written as one, and much more often a word of two or three syllables is broken into two or three words. His tone needs to be read into his writing; it was solemn enough for a wake, and a child or a stranger would be taken in by his little jokes which were uttered as if they were every word gospel truth. The neighbors knew his reputation for little stories and fibs, and once when he expected to startle the town with the authentic news that an old farmer who had been for years lost in a piece of timber-land and a neighbor girl of at least sixty were going to be married, he found that not a soul would believe him.

And even so, anyone will notice how careful he is to write the truth. He leaves rumor as rumor, and says: "I heard that Sis Lang and Carl Deery was married, but I do not say it for the facts, as it is the talk." What might catch people and fool them was the solemn look, the almost mournful tone, the eyes set so deep into his head, the brows hanging over, the jaws long. But his family and friends knew when he meant business, which was only half the time.

It is great that we have his own words, for they not only reveal him but suggest how the Irish, left largely to themselves, speak after three generations in Iowa. Here are some of the letters in the unedited form: "Its fine wether

too day and yester day and its needed for Corn i Was in town last Satter day Had too teath Pulled Had dinner with James [Jimmies] all well thare oald Pat Sweney was Berried Hear friday." Some of the letters are snappy and playful. For instance, on his birthday he was painting the house, and said: "Seventy-five today, and up the ladder I go."¹ As he wrote, some one in the house spoke to him and he put down his own side of the conversation: "Dinner ready? All right, Lu. And I'm ready."

Once I got him to say a very little about early times: he was married in '76 or '77; most people then had ox teams but he "had a team of horses. . . . Yes, Maggie was small, awful small." But his interest never was in anything remote, and when there was nothing left of him but skin and bones and he couldn't see or hear, he talked of men and events of the present. No one has written better of the hard times, which did not begin for him in 1929 or in the 1900's. "Times is very dull up here. Not much money since the two banks closed, nor much business. But a good crop of corn and oats, everything good only potatoes; they're poor and no good, but not so high." A few days later he added: "The town is dead as hell. Nothing doing at all, no business, no money. This would be a good place to build a hospital, it's so still. You cannot see anyone unless you rap on their door, and then they will jump with fear. I am only just here, very dizzy, and old age is telling on me fast."

Scattered through the letters are the things closest to him: home and family most of all, and then things associated with these, such as work and play, the weather, crops, sickness, weddings and Christmas. In his own direct style he says: "I must surely thank you for been so good to me, and I want you to get O a Big flat wide bottle and tell Hem to take my Share too, and I Wish yee a Happy Krs and a mery new years . . . and I wish yee luck. So good By, love to yee all." It is easy to see that people are in the first rank, and everything else is pushed into a lower

¹ The Letters are scattered from 1927 to 1934; he died in 1939.

place. Not cattle and hogs, but human quality—that's his story.

In a letter of "Sept. 24, 1928," he writes: "Well, N, just afew lines . . . I was at morrises Wedding and at the Head off the table at one End and father Murphy at the other End, good time Sure. I am fair at presant. Wee have a fine Kid, hee is five munths old and ways 20 lbs, Just as fat as a Hog and as Cute as Can bee . . . Hura for Smith."

Another day he says: "I was so dizzy I could hardly stand alone, and now I can go up town and Play Cards. But am not well yet. Jim Craig is very poorly, hi blod pressure, very sick man . . . It's coald Hear too day and wee got a good rain or too off late, but Corn is Baddly dameged and gardens no good, potatos Small."

For a while he went off to live in another town and his letter shows that he did not like it:

X, iowa

no 10 1931 tuesday 10 a m

Dear grand dauther Mary

i received your Kind letter and was Surley glad too hear from you and all off ye and that yee are all well. It's Snowing Hear this morning, onley light and Some rain and warm. Mary, this is a german town, 3 Catholicks Curches, one Pole, one german, one irish, about 8000 People Hear; i never Seen any one i know Since i left, onley N and O; i am not lonsome as i Have a good time and well treted. . . . Thank you very mutch, Mary, may you live long and happy; i hope your mother did not get Hurt when she fell off that load of Hay. . . . i got to the Pole Curch—like hell i do. There is Some nice oald maids Hear, and i gess they will bee Hear . . . love to all
my address is
X, Iowa 909 Plain St.

Now that he has left the farm, the overtone of farm talk decreases and the human element becomes more exclusive. He writes:

Dec 26 1932
At K's and E's

monday morning and the Sun is Shining Hear. Well, N and O, Christmas is past and wee had a good time Hear. We had None and Bob and Jack for Supper and two Boys, and Had a good Supper as Could Be, turkey and the table Could Hardley Hould up all the things. Billey and John got the Best lot of Presents, sleds, cats, Shoes and everything good, it Would take too mutch Space too tell you all, and can not write long at a time. But i got my Share of Presants. I hope you and O is well, i wish yee a Happy new years. I cannot think of any more, So good by.

His name always goes down simply and in full at the end, never an initial or merely the first name, or father or brother or grandfather. The farewell often comes after his own name and takes various forms, such as "thank you a gain," "good by, All and Everyone," or "good By and good luck to yee all."

His family was first and last the center of his life, and without fuss or complexity he was steadily loyal to his home and people. So he says: "I got your letter yesterday and always was glad to hear from any of my people, but sorry to hear that you are not well." For nearly forty years he was a widower, and he occasionally joked about hitching up with some old maid or widow, but when a relative said he took a certain widow too seriously he stood up and said, "If the Blessed Mother herself came down from Heaven and asked me to marry her, I would not."

He divided up his little joys with his own people and the neighbors, and he suffered when a child or grandchild suffered. "I am fare for a oald lady," he says, "and keep gone a round, go up town Every day. Do not see K very often as Shee goes out too camp, i gess; did not Hear from lu this week yet . . . nonie is pretty good as i Hear from her often." And he managed to visit this sick one: "I was down to see nonie last Wednesday. Shee is very mutch Better and the nees is lots Better. lue and mee and Billy and John went down and Stayed all night at Sues and went

out to molles and had diner out thare and drove Home that Evning. Thomas has a good House, 5 Rooms redy too move in any day; 9 dogs, 20 gees, 500 hens, one Billy goat, one Coon, one Cow and Contented as a Possum. I am sorry for O loosing his mother as Hee will miss Her. Malika grogan was berried yesterday, Poor oald man. I am just fare for a Boy off my age, all well up Hear at presant. I was a Honery Pall Bery, mee and Billy forde and Ed megawh and Jimy Knolles, 10 of us. Well, i gess i will Close, So i can mail. This is a nice day up Hear."

Another daughter was sick, and he wrote wonderful little letters about her. Here is an unedited one:

Oct 11 1927

dear Sister Just afew lines too let you Know How Wee are up Hear maggie did have a bad Spell But is a good deal better now i am OK and all the rest is well frank Woolf is very low at Presant its rainy too day cold hazey day. wards is well Kit was Hear yes ter day and Stayed all day with maggie. maggie got a good night last night and feels good this morn-ing not mutch too write.

The girl, full of courage and energy and extraordinarily intelligent, dies that month or the next, and his letter tells of her husband and children, this one at work, that one at home, another at school: "all very lonsom Sure and Sad, but none any Sader than me. I do miss maggie in Every Corner i go too, Poor maggie . . . wee are all well at pres-ant, thank god."

Of a sick brother he writes simply, and on a postal: "Sorry to hear off Mike. But can not go. I am not able to stand the trip. But will go if he continues worse. Hope for the better soon. Poor Mike. . . . I will meet you at the wedding and see what wee can do. So be there fixed to go." Even then he closes with one of his usual jokes: "So good by. Best wishes too all. Come up and marry Alphonse; he is like a possum, fat and dirty. Aunt Kate² is picking greens today."

With the pressure of the times, a boy of the family had to go looking for work, and the old man's letters indicate

²Supposed to be a girl-friend of his own.

that he hated to give up this boy and the wife and children. "Did not Hear from al, onley as He wrote on the way; but will soon Hear. Say, i did pitty Hem the day Hee left, Hee was too Bee pittyed, too see Hem leaving them and i cried and am lonsom yet. Theres no one that Would like too Have them close Better than mee, i Surley would. But the job is all now days that they can live on, and you that Have it better stick too it." The wife and children followed, and the next letter says: ". . . i am very anches too find out where is Al and lue and Bille and Poor John and all a Bout them."

Religion had to be simple for him, as simple as eating a meal or plowing a field. It was an ordinary thing, it had its rights, but was not frothy and bubbly or filled with special sighs. Once a long time ago I saw him in a field on Pentecost day. He was helping a new calf to stand and suck, the cow still licking the calf, and the calf's mouth foamy with the fresh milk. All the man said was, "God be thanked for this fine bull calf. And it was a good day for it to come." I asked what breed it was, and he said, "I don't know whose bull it's out of, but the cow is a short-horn, and that's what the calf is, too." He was on the north-west side of the Big Hill where this breaks into two moderate hills and he was pretty far down toward the good bottom-land.

He went quietly to church on Sundays and holy days, received—as was then the custom—a few times a year, especially for his departed relatives, and we may be sure he prayed for rain and for fair weather. He writes: "All well. We went too Confession a friday and too Communion Satter day, all the ~~rest~~ went Sunday onley mee, i did not go as it was Erley; i am gaining some, but did not go out yet and am ~~wæk~~." He hated pretending, and that is what pious raids on the sanctuary seemed to him to be. A daughter says he told her to leave the running of the church to those whose business it was, and to keep out of their way. He was fond, nevertheless, of a certain priest, a sickly little man: they played euchre for ten cents a game,

and no one was far ahead at the end of the year. He never—so far as we know—prayed at meals, probably because he felt that the food men labor for is sufficiently blest.

What he didn't want was noise and fuss about religion or anything else, and if a thing was greatly talked up he lost faith in it.

The human world, his own people—that was his world. The neighbors came next, and the longer they were his neighbors, the nearer they were to him. And if the room was crowded with people, he got up, put his hands behind his back, and walked out: he liked a small and more intimate group. Of course, things were needed, but were kept in the background of his life; riches were never needed or wanted.

This alignment of persons and things became more and more clear as he aged and weakened. After an illness that frightened his people, he was able to go up town and play cards again, and he wrote of a daughter-in-law; ". . . Kathrin is as kind as ever lived and was surely good to me, and all of them is good and kind. May God bless them all." And after a spell that was very serious, he staggered to his feet and praised his people and the neighbors for their care of him. He said:

Dear N,

Just a few lines, I am Still Hear and gaining Some, but slow. I can walk a round the House, but was not out yet. I surely got good care or I would bee ded, I was the Worst the day you left and sufered more that day and the next off all. I surely must Hand it too Poor lue, Shee was at my Bed Side all the time. I thank Every one too the Bottom of my Hart, and for Kathrin I want yee to alwas Love Her and Jime and all the famly for what they did for mee. N, I do not forget what you done for mee. But I cannot write it all. N, I bleave all off melrose Has Come too See mee and some 4 or 5 times; I surely can not forget them. Well, good By and good luck too Poor O. He was good too mee.

CHAPTER III

Died in His Own Cornfield

MARY ANN CAWLEY has never written any letters, and when she has got Christmas wishes a few times from ourselves she has not answered. She can not write. What she is and what she has done—these are terribly united in her, and they have not been learnt in any direct way from any book.

A long time ago, she should have been exhausted and defeated. But she could not be. It is true she has at last been worn out or worn down, by hardship and hard work and perhaps in part by the slow attrition of time. Yet she has not been defeated, and time has had plenty of chances to show that she could not be defeated.

How old is she? This is a question that she cannot answer. "When a body cannot read or write," she says, "they cannot keep count of such things." She was always a big frame, a solid sort of person, and to us she seemed old when we first knew her. In that sense, she was like The Granger: already established, one of the neighbor women, the mother of many children when we first heard of her and began to see her. And there she is yet, outlasting both that man and the lean humanist who after all would hardly have been picked to wear well. (Jackeen, the sickliest little man of four sickly brothers, has outlasted every blessed strong man in the community; during the hottest recent summer they say he plowed corn at night, in his bare feet.) Like the humanist, Mary Ann was born in Canada, and she says her father died on "the fever-ship before they ever reached the shore;" so we must think her own birth was not later than in 'forty-nine.

She would have been a beautiful girl and woman in her day. At any rate, with her strength and fairness and her

gentle manner, she would have been attractive. The Granger was the model strong man, though he never showed off his power, and the one time he tried to play ball, in mature life, he let the ball come through his hands into his face. The tall humanist was a gangling sort, quiet and tricky, and effective at tricks because he was unnoticeable; they say that in the old barehanded baseball he was a tremendous clouter, and once he saved a game with a deep-field catch. The Granger square and bluff and red in the face, the humanist long and loosely built, and in color almost black Irish, Mary Ann square in face and body, the hair in its time toward blonde—these three are among the few who came out of the first days of our neighborhood, through the early years and into our own.

It is a quiet place, over near some tall jackoaks, where Mary Ann has lived so long, her own little house facing the sunrise and tucked away among a dozen scattered apple trees.¹ The yard is a mixture; it is not weedy, it is not grassed and not plowed land. It is that way from lack of care, and also from hard use: from dogs and colts and geese running over it. The soil, there and through most of the fields, is like herself; ever uncomplaining, ever a little more weather-washed.

Her hands have always been full. Once when we went to see her, she told us in a casual way that it was labor enough to keep so many mouths fed: "Thirteen of us together at the board, one or two winters. And then the big boys and girls started to make their own way." They were never all together. The husband was a good man; at least it is safe to guess that no one ever heard her say a word against him. He worked and was honest, but he did not have the knack of making much out of crops and stock. What he and everyone of the sons loved was the horse; they traded horses back and forth among themselves, no one passed any of their teams on the road, and whatever sort of horse any of them had he was ready to run it or pull it against anybody's horse at any time. The husband was

¹ Our mother was born in a log house on that farm.

not a hard drinker, but he was no financier. The result was that she had more or less to look after him along with the children.

At the beginning of the great drought (in 1934) I revisited Mary Ann. A few Plymouth Rocks and a spotted yellow dog with his tongue out had made dust wallows at the north of the house. Inside the house, we talked about the scarcity of money and the poor show for corn and hay. Her voice and all her way was patient and even and calm, as of one who has seen people and skies in every sort of temper. Of course, the house—like almost any farm house—was very bare, nothing much in it beyond the cook-stove and sewing machine and a few chairs. I asked her why so many old geese in the yard. "Ah," she said in the gentle Irish form, "they're all ours; as many geese as goslin's. It's because the price was down so bad last fall; everything's been poor, and the geese so poor we never bothered to gather them up. They're all there, fat and full grown, all but the one or two we did kill in the winter for meat." Then she gave me buttermilk to drink from her own churning of that day; she had kept it covered in a crock on the kitchen table. But she said it was not good, it was thinned out too much. "Hot mornings I do have to pour in water, to get the butter to gather." Everything, such as clothes and floors, was clean.

At her own request, I blessed her where she knelt, as humble and believing as a nun. "Put your hands on my head and pray the way you did the last time you were leaving."

Well, what of her own, the thirteen, almost every one of them either tall or broad and one or two of them both? Eight of them now, she said, lying on the clay hill beside the father; the others scattered a good while ago. No sigh at all; she just said these words. And one boy at home with her. He was a long, lumbering colt, adapted to hillsides; which is only to say that he was like so many of us in that section. We called for him, and he came in from the field where he was replanting corn.

The mother had prepared the visitor for this boy. He was a good boy, but sometimes he did run with bad company; even these words, out of his hearing, were not said in a way that found fault with him. She added only this: "He be's gone two and three days at a time and me here alone and no one to tell my story to."

Would I not say a few little words to him? She was keen for the suggestion that I ask him whether for love of her poor self and of Christ he would not take the pledge against drink. He came quickly to the house, but was not for any such pledge. The excuse he gave was a good one, yet might or might not be the real one. He said, "I know. I would have to dress up and go to the church." This was easily answered, and he knelt there on the floor before his mother and the crucifix, and he quite seriously went through the words. The poor fellow's face was itself a patch of dust mulch, full of a weedy little beard and crooked rows of perspiration running through it. Yet the whitish lean face had an innocent and childlike look. He got up then and went back to his replanting, himself and the plowed field as dry as bone.

When we were children at home we naturally took Mary Ann for granted, as we did any neighbor woman, and it was only during these later pilgrimages that we came to learn how strong and patient and genuine she is. It is clear that our own mother in her frank way admired Mary Ann, but this good woman was too humble to know that she was admired or even openly to admire another; it would have been a presumption and a liberty, and she did not allow herself so much.

Mary Ann has been alone very often, for a good many years. She told me and still tells me, trip after trip, her own story; especially of losing her family. The children went one by one, as quite mature men and women, and she is left alone. Of course, she puts this in her own language, a straight, plain mid-west language, and at the same time a language that remains more itself and independent than that of any other person I have known; it is meagre

but native, not got from books or radio or phone or very much from the neighbors; so it is her very own.

One boy was magnificent, he was so big, a tall, broad man, and erect too, unless he stooped a tiny bit at the shoulders. He had been a soldier, the biggest man in camp. Well, she would never have had him in camp in the first place, but at home and on the farm. And then the poor fellow got the influenza, in its worst days when it was still new and so poorly understood. She rushed to him, herself and a son-in-law, a tremendous big strong man, and like all her own, innocent and youthful looking in the face, a man of almost foolish generosity. She took care of the boy, and stayed at his bedside—"Nothing else would do him or quiet him, and the soldiers let me." The big son and the big son-in-law both died of the strange disease. And to this day she says the boy died only because of neglect by officers and the camp's medical man.

To lose him was bitter enough, and it was worse because it happened away from home. "It was hard," she said. "It was hard, dying away like that in a soldier's camp. I would not have minded if he had died at home in his own cornfield."

This last sentence was herself, and was easy to say. No other woman or man in our community could have said it.

Another son died soon. He was the one who—it seems to us—was always buying and trading little horses and cattle, and in the autumn was always dragging his weight of green corn up or down the slopes where he hand-cut it and shocked it. His going was sudden, he died of a hemorrhage, but it was expected, and he died at home.

Then it was the turn for the oldest, a man who was up to fifty or so. In his day he had taken to drink and had had runaways and broken legs. But for several years he had settled down and stayed with the mother and at last lived by himself, a matter that she did not think exceptional. The trouble with him was that the heart was bad. So she made everything ready and told him to be ready; she put a crucifix, she says, over "verninst" his bed, where he

lived alone, so he could reach it there handy if ever there was need. He died in that little promise of a home that he had started. A neighbor had seen this man choring on the morning of the Fourth: "he had brought me meat the night before, poor boy, so's I wouldn't be without;" and an hour later, another neighbor going by had found him lying dead in the yard grasping the crucifix and the blessed candle.

If a boy lived at home and died at home, that was the main thing. And they were all good boys, every one of them.

She has always kept going to church on Sundays, but sometimes she did not have a way to go. Surely God would not be far from her in any case. What she has loved and ever been close to is the soil, and also her plain, hard devotions, and her people. But even the soil, native and dear as it is to her, is one remove from her; the children are closest. We know what she has worked for, day by day, what she wanted to have every day with her, and what she thought of every hour.

No wonder the neighbors do not understand her very well, since she is cut off so notably from them. She has not much to talk about but the children; and that is natural for a woman who has hardly loved anybody or anything else. Some of the neighbors, not seeing her often and assuredly not knowing her, have said: "Now don't you think it's odd, the way Mary Ann goes on, always telling the same stories and always about the children? Well, I suppose it's being alone so much makes her that way." In their own minds, they make little concessions to her. But they don't offer them to her, and she would not in a thousand years want any such thing. And what we may also be sure of is that she would never look into any of their business; they are welcome to their own ways.

In many matters she must have suffered, the poor lone woman, and in her native style she has told me what she thinks the hardest day in her life. It was the death of her girl, the one who was left a widow after the generous young

husband. Maybe the girl did run a little bit wild; at least the mother, who could not have been suspicious, thought so; and maybe she ran wild sometimes unbeknownst to the mother. But the mother in a way knew and felt something was coming.

She says, "I feared something was wrong." She didn't fear it; we can see that she knew it; her tone and her straight-out words express knowledge.

"That very morning, I seen something, there by the lilac bush at the door: my own mother, it was like: just for one instant, and then it was gone. I said, 'Something is going to strike me like lightning.' And I dropped down on my knees at the end of the table where I was doing the breakfast dishes, and I prayed God, as I did often, to send that boy as an angel to watch over my girl. For the boy was good and he loved her dearly."

In the middle of that night, the poor old woman heard that the girl was killed, and away from herself, far out on the public highway. Nothing that ever could have happened at home could have been half so bad. Still, the mother was in some way ready, and in that fact she finds comfort. She says, "Now don't you think the boy did come, and the girl was kept by God?"

No picked sons, she says, or daughters: "I loved them all alike." We ourselves know they were all full of good nature, honest, the very best workmen; they knew how to work and they liked work; they never came late to help in threshing and they never sent a boy to fill a man's boots. One of the very best of them was sometimes gruff toward her, and once when I made my annual visit she said he wouldn't so much as speak to her. This one was a good man, as dependable as oak, a lithe spare man, well known among the neighbors as a judge of horses, but himself sometimes not easily manageable. He could get hot under the collar, and the worry with him at that moment was that he knew that some others spent and drank too freely; and he thought the mother was not firm enough with them.

At any rate, he was soured now even toward her. She

said, "No, he does not stay with me. I do leave bread and milk and clean clothes outside the door and he gets them." That was all she would say. While we talked he came, a good honest man if he did sometimes seem abrupt. The wooden gate banged open and chain-tugs rattled into the yard.

"There he is now," she said. "Maybe you would go and speak to him. I would only anger him more."

Toward our family, this man was always the best of neighbors. But he wasted no words with anyone and would stand for no nonsense. Today his first words were in anger, and he left it to us, if we could, to figure out of whom he spoke. The old mother kept back and said not a word to praise or blame anybody; if she wept, a person would have a hard time to tell it. At last this strong man softened a little and said some kindly thing of his mother and my mother and two other women of their kind and time. There were none now'days, he said, like them. Then the mother put in a word, though a modest and cautious one.

That has been the life of Mary Ann: hope and prayer and endless labor. She expected no favors and got very few. In such a hard life, did she ever have a chance to rest at all? Well, for one thing she was born strong; she came of one of the strongest families in the neighborhood, and her brother was the most famous man we ever had at pulling square-hold. Besides, she has lived near the earth, almost in the woods and much of the time in a dry atmosphere, and these have a tonic quality in them. There were some things in her life to bear her up and to preserve her. One may be sure that the family's food, though it would never have been luxurious, was as fresh and good as nature and woman's care could make it; and the low house, which seems to us now to have been long and narrow and awkward, was always immaculate. Not one of the many children was ever ragged or dirty. She was expert at making shirts and patching overalls, and my mother often said, "See how Mary Ann keeps the clothes of so many washed and patched." And probably most important was her faith

in people, her simple belief that no one would do wrong to anyone.

Well, there she is, a big massive woman, Irish of course, yet also Iowan; long enduring, gray and worn, and yet hardly ever tiring. Like so many of the men and women with us, she must always have had the appearance of autumn or winter looking out from the eyes of June, yet she has remained self-possessed and unconquerable. In a real sense, she will never wear out; she can't.

It is only in her great-grandmother days that her eyes begin to fail, but it seems sure that her body will to the last bear up quite well; her teeth are firm, and her hearing is good to this day. Anyone might be surprised to see that her flesh, in her body and in her face, is only now beginning to fall away. Her voice and face are sad but quiet, the voice slow and nearly monotone as if she was talking to herself, but the voice and everything with her is peaceful and well controlled. She does lean a very little, but this is less a giving in to time than in indulgence toward her own people. As well as she can and as long as she can, she will serve these, and when she cannot she will take this simply as the way of things and as part of the life of a woman.

CHAPTER IV

Fearing a Ringboned Girl

THE last time I went to see Mary Ann, the Big Man took me around the horse-shoe of little yellow hills in his car. Where she lives is away from the road east. We drove past the end of this road, then took two or three small turns, really as much backward as forward, straightened out in part for a mile or so, then slid from cork to cork of the shoe, and in a short time went up and down over a swell of earth to her house.

Mary Ann was at home. She was washing clothes. Yet she had given in a bit, and admitted that it was too hard for her to haul clothes around any more in the heat of midday. All the same it was herself that washed them. She said she could do them in the cool of the evening and hang them out in the cool of the morning.

We were brought up a broken step and into the bare sitting room where she began to trim at the black wick of a lamp. The poor old eyes couldn't tell their story at once; so she said, "And who is that with you?" But after a blink she recognized him. "Well, it's Tommy! Come in and sit down. You're both welcome; you're as welcome as can be!" The room could have been much more bare; it had two sofas and two sewing-machines; for things had been brought from the house of the girl and her big generous husband.

Indeed, Big Man was welcome. We might be sure beforehand that he was welcome, and good and welcome, at Mary Ann's. In many ways, he was like a ninth son of the house, he was so big and tall and straight, and so innocent in manner and look; but he was less solid in build than most of her boys.

Big Man was welcome anywhere in the neighborhood.

There were neighborhood pests, endless borrowers and endless talkers; but I doubt if anyone ever frowned at Big Man's approach. He was not at all like a tramp, and he didn't wish himself on people. People liked to see him come for a visit in the fields, or to give them a hand at fencing stacks or ringing pigs, though he had not any great get-up as a worker. Or they liked to have him just to stand around in the lots or the yard, and to sit down at any time of the day to their table. Without any boldness, with an actual and unpretended modesty and reserve, he came a long way into our lives.

Soon after he was born, in the early 'seventies, he lost his father.¹ The mother married again and migrated west, but Big Man's guardian would not allow the child to go. In that way, Big Man was an orphan, and even his foster parents and his foster brother went a long while ahead of him. He was the neighborhood orphan, and yet not like an orphan at all, since he was at home in half a dozen places and never far from home anywhere. Why, then, didn't he who was so welcome go and live with someone? Well, there are two sides to that story; Big Man wanted a home of his own, and we may be sure there were good women who would have liked to have seen to most of the arrangements; almost any woman would; but he was a cautious man.

What was hard for us, a good deal younger, and what we in fact never did was to think of Big Man as an orphan or as ever having been a child at all. The Granger was big, a heavy block of a man; Mary Ann was one of our many big women. But this man was the giant of the community, the biggest man we ever knew, though to Mary Ann he remained "Tommy."

Big as he was, no child ever feared him. All we can now say is that perhaps we did as children stand off a little from him, as we would from an enormous gentle horse. We felt a certain awe before him in his broad shoes and old hat

¹ His father died the same year as one of our great grandfathers, and is buried near him.

that was sweaty and as soft as a rag, and the legs of the overalls like big long sacks. Everybody knew that he had his Sunday suit made for him by a tailor forty miles away, and his shoes were ordered special. Surely it was not for us to ask about a man's world, a world which, as presented then to children, was sacred and wholly right. And Big Man was one of the world's cornerstones.

Yet for a big heavy man, or for any man, he handled himself well, getting around to everything that was going on, wakes and dances and threshings. He was not awkward, and never got in his own way. When he rode he sat upright and natural on the horse, though we doubt whether he ever 'loped a horse in his life, and after that operation he had long ago at Dr. Murphy's in Chicago he was always careful not to jump onto a horse, or even onto a pony. He was nice and light on his feet, and could dance as well as the smartest of the boys, and until he was over fifty he did so; and the boys and girls did not have to ask him three times to get a dance at his own house. People always said, too, that he had been a footracer when he was young, but we naturally laughed at the notion, and it was even said, though maybe just as a saying, that once in his best days he outran a horse for a hundred yards.

Big Man lived alone in a tall, white, narrow house, and never, in our time, in the old loghouse on his place. He was born in the loghouse, of course, "on the farm owned and occupied by him at the time of his death." So the notice in the town paper said, and it was true. It was also reported that he was a "prosperous farmer and livestock owner, and a man of admirable qualities." No one would ever think of doubting either of these points.

But an important point was omitted. Big Man had only a limited circle of friends. Out north and west of town few people knew Big Man well, down east toward the county seat it is safe to say that only the old settlers, and not all of them, ever heard of him, and over beyond the next little town to the south and southeast not more than a scattered dozen or two were so much as acquainted with him. All

his life, his range was in between our town and this other. But there he was at his ease, there on that little spot he was at home, and was known by every single soul, and was feared and despised by no one. And a radius of three or four miles was a good distance in those days.

One may say then that Big Man had a small group of friends. That is really the case. Yet it is certain that few men ever had closer or better friends. He died in a neighbor's house, and he might have died in any neighbor's house, and the family would have felt he had done it the greatest honor. People have said that something went out of their lives when Big Man died, and I am sure they do not look for anyone ever wholly to take his place.

Big Man had gone away to school. Early one fall, so old people used to tell, he went away; everybody knew he was at school; he was at college, they said; and he did not come home till the next spring. I do not know what he learnt from books, but he was always remarkable for his courtesy. Of course, people paid very little attention to this—that's just the way Big Man was. He had a touch of genuine refinement about him. He addressed married women, "Yes, Ma'am," "I didn't understand you, Ma'am;" and was in no great hurry to call them by their first names. I mean the women who came into the neighborhood partly as strangers. Naturally it was different with the women he had known all his life, and with their children.

He had a great cleanness of mind, too, and a notable physical cleanliness. It was himself that saw to it that his everyday clothes were kept washed and neatly patched (he never wore his sleeves rolled), and on a cool day his Sunday collar stood up clean and white as a dude's. In March weather when the frost was oozing out of the ground and everything was soggy and miry and the cattle were half way to their hocks in mud, Big Man could go into the lots and feed and bed all the stuff, and come back with his rubber boots slicked off fit to go into anyone's front room or to church or a box supper.

This big lovable neighbor, this neat and proper man

was wary. Caution was a main weakness with him, and he always kept holding back a little from the full sweep and vigor of farm life. All the same, he was anything but a sad man, and we may doubt whether anyone ever saw him really dejected. When he took me to Mary Ann's he was not well, he was actually down to two-ten in weight; the doctor said there was something wrong inside so that he couldn't last long, and everybody said there was nothing left of him but the shell. The big chops of him were not what they had been. Yet he was full of his old fun, he had his little jokes, and he knew and enjoyed the turns of things in the neighborhood. He laughed as usual, a hearty and big fluffy laugh, a "pluff, pluff, pluff" starting far down and working up by way of the fat throat and face.

Of late years he used to blow a little with his breathing, a matter which, of course, came on gradually and to which we got used. For the sake of making company he took a chew now and then or tried to manage a cigar, but it was far from clear that he relished either of them. He played euchre, or at any rate played at it, and once in a while he banged a card down on the table in six-hand, puffing and laughing, but his joy and good spirits arose from the presence of the crowd and not from taking tricks or winning; to tell the truth, he seldom put up a stiff fight, he would lapse and talk about other things and sometimes he even forgot what was trump.

In a distant and untraced way, he was a relative of our family on our mother's side, but it was through an uncle on the other side that he was close to us. He and this uncle were more than good neighbors to each other, and in a sense even more than brothers, for brothers will sometimes have a little set-to over something. Such quiet friendliness, such total agreement, such common understanding! It was as if it would be a sin for one to dispute the other on anything. Their farms joined, and they met and talked every day. Neighbors referred kindly to them as "Tom and Tom," because their own conversations repeated this name so often.

"Hello, Tom."

"Oh, hello, Tom. I never seen you till you were right there."

"Just thought I'd go down and salt the colts and calves. What are you doing, Tom?"

"I thought I'd set some posts, over by the spring."

"It looks a little like rain."

"Oh, gosh, I don't know, Tom. Well, I don't know, Tom. Well, I don't know, maybe it will rain before long. An' I don't know but we're beginning to need a shower."

On just one thing the Big Man was or would have been touchy in relation to his friend. He often called at the friend's house in the evening, and once he got rained or snowed in and had to stay all night. The bed held him up for the night, but as he got up in the morning the bed went down. Everyone in the house heard the crash and the family would have made a neighborhood joke of it, but Big Man wouldn't allow anyone to say a word.

What he himself did by and large was to play a safe game in life. Never a word or a deed that was startling, never too big a crop, never very late rising or retiring. He didn't take chances. I saw him and Billy's Billy breaking a colt one summer day, really a big, lazy horse with a full mouth. They had him hitched in with an old brood-mare to an iron-wheeled wagon, and weighted down with ropes; a third man or boy, a helper, dangled his feet from the back of the wagon, the endgate down and his only purpose there, Billy's Billy said, was to jump out if the colt ran away.²

The main thing was to take care. That was Big Man's way. He was anxious all the time about little dangers; germs, and weather, and colds, and hard knocks, and sharp tools; and we may be sure that the people who were most fond of him would say the chief drawback with him was caution.

He kept free of strenuous action, and also of novel

² It won't do to say "Bill McGraw," because there are (at least) Bill and Billy and Bill's Billy and Billy's Billy.

opinions about men or cattle, and ran to the conservative side at once. "Hang it all, boys!" he'd say. "You know, I'd a little sooner they'd try it somewhere else. Better know what the ground's like under your feet." His most violent words had a hold-back in the tone and manner, and were no worse than, "Say, dog-gone it, now!" When news or jokes happened to be very spicy, he would say, "Hot tang, fellows!" And he and our uncle were fond of "Is that so?" and "Darn it, now!"

He would try to ease the neighbors up on any really rough talk about others. "I know, Jim, but hecks! He's had a hard row to hoe; there, you might say, alone on that place; he never did have a chance." Once I saw, and perhaps he let me see, how hurt he was over some old trouble between neighbors: "Well, anyhow, but two neightbors, you know, like that! And them so well known, that's what's bad. Darn it, it's—I tell you—it's not right."

Never was he suspicious toward people, and it was seldom that he was touchy. As a friend and neighbor he was hard to match, though it may be that even with those closest to him he never quite let himself go or gave a full account of himself. He inherited good land and some money, and all in all he had a pretty good thing of it in cattle; he would scout around quietly and pick up only choice stock, white-faced stuff; he let them run in pastures that a poor farmer would have been glad to mow for hay, and when he came to feed them out he was not stingy with the corn. And yet he never made or cared to make a lot of money. People who had land and a bit of money were into cattle; take it one year and another, the feeding of cattle, with a few shoats to clean up after them, was the best thing a man could do with land and corn. So Big Man was into the business, too, and made a modest sum out of it, not that he was greedy or in any way wed to money, but it was the custom. He drove no all-day bargains, and he hated to give up his fat beeves for any price.

The real case with him was that the cattle were like friends to him. He wouldn't cram stock as it went to the

scales, likely as not for fear that a big fill might start a belly-ache. Once he found one of the lads, as he called them, lodged between two trees by the spring below the loghouse. The steer had been there two or three days, and Big Man in his great anxiety, not to avoid the financial loss but to relieve the suffering animal, actually fed the steer to death. The poor man was half sick at the thought of it. He said, "By gosh, fellows! It must have been awful, now. The flies, and not a drop of water, and all afternoon the hot sun square on his rump!" And worst of all, he could somehow make out that it was his own fault.

Cattle were something, and were to be taken care of, but what Big Man loved of all the goods of the earth was the horse. Everyone knew this; and it was a byword with all the people. He drove a picked team of big mares, Fox and Ribbon, a team fit for first prize; but he never entered horse or cow at any fair. A string of leggy Norman colts, up to five and six years old, was kept running in the white clover in summer and fed at the troughs in winter; he had a few old mares, thick and well bodied down, and these colts were all out of them. He kept the horse colts only until they were broken and ready for the buyer, but he couldn't find it in his heart to let any of the mares go till the place was crowded with them. No neighbor could afford to buy any of Big Man's horses, they were so nicely finished out and ready for the best markets.

I recall when he had nothing but bald-faced bays, then for a few years, he ran into bays with a stripe on the nose, and once he had blacks, but no one ever knew him to have a gray or a sorrel, maybe because such colors can easily lack character and are too likely to be patchy and neutral; or maybe it was because he grew up with bays and blacks and was attached to them.

The big mares were the pride and joy of his life, and it would take the good out of his dinner to see one of them suffer from a colic or get badly wired. He'd pet them: "Say, Fan, you didn't get hurt, did you, now? Hold up your foot here, girl, and let's see. Better be sure." Once a big

mare got sick, and one neighbor said to another that she was very sick. "Well," said the other, "if she is, Big Man will send for the priest." He was no third-rate hand with cattle and hogs, but he was best with the horses. The big mares were broken to work, or at least had harness marks on them; they were more corned than grassed, they were curried gently, and he always drove a mighty pair of them. But they were mild and harmless creatures, tame in the use of their immense power, and were never known to snap a tug or a double-tree.

Though Big Man lived alone, a bachelor, it was plain that he did not plan a solitary life. Much less did he love that life. He liked to have men in to dinner when they worked the roads down his way, and everyone knew that he could bake biscuits. Anything was better than to be alone. A couple of times a year he had two or three little girls come to do housecleaning and to visit with him; they say they used to find two loaded guns, one upstairs and one down. He so loved people that even his wake was arranged by himself as a social event; he said the people should have a good time at it, dance if they wanted to, and a foster niece says he gave her money to get candy for any children that might attend. At his request, the people were to wake him at his own house, and if the weather turned bad he said they should put his big black mares on the hearse; he said his friend Tom was to drive them. What he loved first and last was people, and he never wanted or meant to be alone.

His singleness, we might say, was a kind of accidental child of his caution, not a sought or welcome thing. The tall white house was built by himself, and people knew, when that was going up, what it implied: Big Man meant business; yet the wiser ones knew he meant it only in a kind of general way; he was serious of course, but careful.

He went to the dances without fail, he took up now and then with a girl, sometimes with a girl only half his own age, and when he was past fifty people claimed he was looking at a girl of seventeen. The common thing to say

of a man in his fix was that he needed a cook, and people said that of Big Man and he said it of himself, especially when he was building the house. Everything was kept spick and span; so the talk continued. In fact, he spoke more than genially to two or three women in this time, but he was careful not to say the word that would have committed him. Any old woman and many an old man could have guessed what Big Man would have loved above everything else, and that was children and grandchildren. Well, once some people thought that at last a match was about to be made, but Big Man shied away, and a woman in the neighborhood said, "No, don't you believe it, he'll never marry —for fear the girl would turn out to be ringboned or spavined." Be sure, too, that this neighbor woman, like all the rest of us, was a good and close friend of Big Man's.

The neighbors will always know him as a man who trod humbly on our Iowa soil, who thought highly of good horses and looked on people with reverence. The fields seem better because he went over them, horses and steers seem more human because this man had such a respect for them. From Big Man's white house we can see on a clear day the cross and the slate roof of the church started by the people before the Civil War, a building with which his own father must have helped. Well, for a long time the memory of the gentle Big Man will remain in our neighborhood as clear and right and almost as sacred as that cross on that strong roof.

CHAPTER V

Hungry Horse at the Door

WHICHEVER road a person took, it was a long way from our neighborhood to J. J.'s. If he went west by town, he had a better road than the one east by the old Stone place; but each of them was long, and rough, and hilly. There wouldn't be more than one level mile out of the ten. And few people ever made the trip, one way or the other, for few had reason to make it.

But once I had made it, I liked to make it again. I didn't dislike the road, and I certainly liked J. J. I took the east road. I went down what was called "the road east," turned left into the horseshoe road, and stopped at Mary Ann's.

Four or five big sons and sons-in-law were in her yard, surrounding two or three little horses. They expected me; for several days I had been making a horse trade with Mary Ann's seventh son. My own animal was a mule, a fat round little jenny that couldn't be whipped into anything beyond a lazy trot. The boy had never traded horses, but had bought a broncho mare colt, and this had grown now to a three-year-old. The little broncho changed hands quickly then, and I was told that if she fetched a colt I had to stand the fee.

She was a nice little mare, as gentle and trusting as a child, never fighting for her rights but glad to get what was given to her. Of course, she was born of straight broncho parents, somewhere on the ranges farther west, and was branded when yet a colt. Every summer a carload or two of bronchos was shipped into our town, and auctioned off, one or two bronchos at a time, as soon as the crowd had gathered around them in the stockyards. It was easy to pick up a colt for five or six dollars, and in that way a boy was started into the horse business, with some-

thing to be proud of, to talk about and to look after, and that's precisely the way Mary Ann's boy got his little mare, at first a starved sliver of a colt, a sorrel with too wide a stripe in her narrow face.

I had business over J. J.'s way, but by the time I had made the trade and gone on the poor hungry broncho mare into unknown territory, it was after dark. Now there is nothing more pleasant than to ride a horse at night over hills, through woods and along new roads. It was summer, dry but not hot. After a couple of hours, we were into the prop country, the section where the people piece out the returns from thin soil by cutting burroak and second-growth hickory to serve as props in the mines. At a white square house near a crossroad I asked the way. The man of the house turned out to be a very dark man named Sam Klubnock, a propper who also farmed and who had a red calf for sale for fourteen dollars. He told me the road, and said the next house was on the left and a long way.

It would have been easy for me to have passed the next house, but the poor bronch' was not big or strong, and she must have been dying of thirst. The road made straight for the middle of the house, and then turned ready to go down a steep hill. No light in the house, but that did not matter.

All I said was that I had talked with Sam and that I wanted a bucket of water. A man answered through a window, "Damn' dry ridge. Ah, maybe there's a bucket or half a bucket there, anyway, there in that rain-water barrel at the corner of the house. Turn your horse into that hog-lot, south, and come in and stay all night."

Now all houses were always open, and our neighborhood didn't have a total of three locks. But J. J.'s invitation was a little sudden. I said it wasn't right to come in on a man of whom I only knew the name, and that it was better to go on. "Na," he said, "stop here tonight, and we'll see what tomorrow'll be like."

Then I went in and found that he had never got out of his bed. He did not get out now, but told me where the

pantry was, and also the way upstairs to bed. He asked no questions, not even who I was.

In the morning, we all stood around on the hill and looked at each other: J. J. and I and his wife Lutie and three or four children, and a hired man he had, named Joe Egbert. The hill was a great lump of clay with rocks in its sides, and the whole place was as dry as a board. J. J. said there was no water to wash our faces, because the sorrel bronch' had drunk it last night. "Is that the thing you rode?" he said. "She needs more than water." But nobody offered her anything. Joe was going around choring, harnessing up. A long low barn hung over the edge of the hill toward the creek, called the North Cedar; and the house, white and new and of planed lumber, was back a few rods from where the pointed ridge began, and the white-clay road curved past its front door. What no one would ever think was that the people had really come to stay on this wild, sterile hilltop, in this field where nothing but scattered weeds would grow.

J. J. knew what I felt. He said, "What do you think of the layout? It's rough, aint it?" He always spoke as simply and directly as that; he knew little reserve or diplomacy; what we called "policy" was not in him.

Our people were well used to rolling country, and all of the neighbors—unless it would be The Granger who had much good prairie land—knew what it was to go up and down the hillsides. But J. J.'s place was both steep and bare, the hills were only the bony remnants of land, half way up they were yellow clay, then they turned worse, for the yellow edged off into white clay, and nothing on God's earth will grow in white clay except burroak and blue-stem, and not even the two of these at the same time.

No apology from J. J. whose face was red, the eyes reddish, and the whole of him like a skeleton. "Yes," he said, "it's rolling ground." He knew he understated it, for he was looking down into ditched slopes, the color of dried burdock. "But a person gets used to it. Take a winter—and a summer, and maybe another winter or two, and

then you don't mind." He said an aunt of his had come from Ohio to visit him: "I brought her in at night, through the timber there where you came, and it was froze up and we kept jolting along a good while. Then in the yard here I threw out the lines like I always do and left her sitting in the buggy while I put up the team. She was cold and jarred to pieces and sore in more ways than one. Then I says, 'Come on, get out, we're home.' But froze as she was, she wouldn't get out. 'Well,' says I, 'and how do you like my holding?' 'Your holding!' says she. 'My God, J. J., how did you ever get in here in the first place!' 'Ah,' says I, 'I came in from the other side,' and I did, too. It's over that way—right across that bottom and up and over that hill—my father lived for forty years before I was born, and there he died, too. That's a tough piece of country, over there; it's rolling all right, and rocks in it, and ditchy, with scrubby, scrawny timber on it." He said it was land that an ant couldn't live on or a bee fly over.

But his relative from Ohio, sitting there in the dark, thought it must be nice smooth land. The next morning she found out, when she looked from the upstairs window, "there where you did this morning, and there it was in front of her, 'the other side.' There it was, in its glory, and the sun shining on it. Well, to make the story short, she was going to stay six months, I think it was, but she got out of here, one way or another, before noon the first day."

I went often to J. J.'s afterward, and he often repeated that story and any others that he had. Or he'd repeat only a phrase, knowing we'd all get the allusion: "We came in from the other side." What was impossible for him was to go undistracted, and any of his jokes or stories would allow him for the moment to get out of himself and into the life of the listener. His arms were long, and the gestures wide, much like the full sweep of the boxer. Smoking and talking went together, and his mouth watered with the coming and going of the pipe. For the most part he laughed when he ought to, but he laughed too long. The impression he gave was of a man slightly hiding, not from the neighbors, but

from himself. He had an irregular vigor, a real strength that never got a chance. Lord! we used to say long after, if J. J. had just settled down, if he had gathered himself together, kept still for a while, and let himself alone.

Even that first fall I worked some little time for J. J. and came to know him. He was good-natured, clever at work, and talkative. Any day at all, he would disappear and at any time of day or night. And he'd reappear without announcement or fuss. He was like the weather—something that just happened. Joe Egbert did what he could, which wasn't much. He kept pottering around at some chores. The little boy and the three little girls ran loose on the hill. Even Lutie seemed to pay no attention to the absence of J. J.

At night, people came home to roost. Joe did his little choring, he milked a cow if there was one milking, he closed the barn. The children came in, but did not say, "Where's Poppie? Will Poppie be home tonight, Mum?" Lutie herself did not listen for the bark of the dog. At first, all I knew was that the man was not there, the buggy and the bay team were gone, and Joe said to me, "Don't put in any feed for J. J.'s team, and always feed and water light when he *does* come."

Once when he had been gone two days, he got back just as we were getting out of the house at dawn. We heard him shout, "Whoa, horses!" Out went the lines, as they always did. He was immediately about his business; he wanted to know whether the second-bottom was all plowed; he said he'd run a plow today, and told Joe to hitch in the old mule with the bay team. He looked just as usual, no redder in face or eye, the same leanness and physical emptiness in his body. "Breakfast for three men, Missus!" he roared. In less than an hour he was in the field, and he worked all day.

That was one day. The next day he asked Joe to harness the same three-horse team for him. But when we came in at noon, the team was in the barn harnessed. Joe said, "Guess he's rode off on that little one of yours." Only the Lord knew where he was.

In the house, everything was in order, and Lutie herself in the best humor. "He's gone to buy cattle," she said.

Joe put down his spoon quickly, and took up his bowl of hot bean soup and started to drink it. But it burnt him, and he put it down quickly, and spoke out of the middle of his throat, never moving a lip: "Got too many cattle now." Nobody said anything, and he replied to himself: "That's what I'd say." Joe was a little man with tight little round blue eyes, and gray hair that stuck out from his head, so that the eyes looked rounder and smaller.

When we were out of the house, I asked him whether J. J. would be home that night. "Most likely not," was all he said. Well, would he buy the cattle? "Can't tell. He often does."

Sometimes he did come home the first night, and usually he was driving cattle. Once he came alone along the unfenced timber road driving forty head of steers. He got home just at daybreak, and as we got up we found his hat and pipe moving around over the steers in the dry lot. He said they were underfed and "gant" but good stuff, and he said we'd pour new corn into them; but in fact he sold them before a week. Sometimes he picked up odds and ends of cattle, a fat bull, some rough feeders, and once he brought home a black heifer calf in the buggy, its four feet tied together with wire.

Good corn grew in the bottom land along the North Cedar, and this is what went into the cattle. He knew in a rough way that he made on some cattle and lost on some, but he never knew where he stood. It was mainly by a series of accidents that he kept more or less on his feet, though it is true that he was a good judge and that once in a while he outguessed some of the smart traders. And even at that, it was likely just a question of time till he would get stuck and have to give up his farm, for anyone would know that he had not a firm hold on the land at any time.

What he did not want around the place was cattle that wouldn't feed out. When, in order to get good cattle, he

had to take any tail-enders, he singled them out the first day and told Joe to take "these culls" over to the timber eighty. Joe might complain that he hadn't seen those he had taken over last, and that the spring was dry or frozen over. That was all the same to J. J. who, though never angry in his life and seldom impatient for half a minute, would say, "Take them on over! I won't be looking at them. They're not fit to eat corn with good cattle."

Whenever cattle arrived, Lutie came out and looked them over, herself smiling, a kind of scalded look on her. And we got a big meal then, whatever the time of day, fried chicken, fried potatoes, gravy, butter borrowed from the Hoosier family at the foot of the hill.¹

For a man who never worked, J. J. was incredibly hard and could stand up to a day's labor alongside men well used to it. He shucked just one day, and that was on a bet. Of course, it was a race, the three teams and wagons going from daylight till dark. J. J. took the lead early in the morning—as soon in fact as he pleased, and he kept it. What some of us expected was that he would wear down, that he would fold up long before noon. He did not, and toward evening with the chill settling down, he pulled farther into the lead. It was a mystery how a man who was not accustomed to work and who liked to sit and talk, could be silent all day and work like a horse. At shovelling the corn into the crib, a senseless high crib, he was just as surprising; other men would let up and talk a moment, but J. J. bent over and never straightened up from the "Zoom, zoom" of the old scoop till the last ear was in the crib.

Children are born selfish, and we do well if we ever get to a reasonable degree over this condition. That was not the case at J. J.'s. One of his little girls, the redheaded one, was the most unselfish child I have ever seen. As the saying goes among us, she would give you the bite out of her mouth. And he himself was unselfish. He knew that

¹ "Hoosier" is anybody who doesn't belong in our neighborhood or rookery; he is a Gentile, an outsider.

he had neighbors and that they had needs and rights. He had an uneven but hearty way of looking to the needs of his own house. Sometimes he brought home lamb chops, enough for a couple of days, but the family and the help sat down and ate them all at once. And he didn't bring them just because he liked them, or to placate people at home; he did it largely because he liked to see others eat what they liked. And he enjoyed his own food because other people ate with enjoyment at the same time. That kind of generous social feeling must, of course, have helped to keep him also at the drink.

That very year a mine shaft was sunk not half a mile off J. J.'s place, and a stub of railroad was run by the company up the bottom and through J. J.'s land. Four miners and one miner's wife came and stayed with Lutie. Now miners and farmers never love each other, but these miners were contented at J. J.'s. The new mine was to be "18" and when miners reported that men at "16" or "17" were out of work and suffering, J. J. had Joe Egbert bring some of the "buffalos" in from the timber eighty, to see if any one of them had any flesh on it. None of them had; so he shot two of the best fat steers he had, and stood at the end of the barn on a raw day, in his shirtsleeves, and skinned them and cut up the meat. Then he threw the chunks on a flat-rack and told Joe to go and give all the meat to the miners.

He was eventually to profit by the coming of the new mine, for he was to sell the coal rights and get more for them than the land itself—which was called the surface or top—was worth. He knew that would be the case; but no such thought prompted his sending the meat to the miners, "the poor devils."

When he did work he liked what he did; he never looked up, and at the butchering he never quit humming. He had a bareness, almost a boniness of appearance that would make a person feel cold on an autumn day, but he wore no flannel shirt and no gloves or cap, and he never had an overcoat or an overshoe. If he had had any such things, he would have given them away.

He was not much of a man for going to church; it was not that he ever lost the Faith, but for several years running he was not serious about anything. Yet he made me splice the bronch' with one of his bays and go with him to the mission when it came to the mining town to the east. We went along gently until time to tie the team at the hitch-rack in the town; then the whole top of the buggy, having worked loose in front, tipped back all the way to the ground. J. J. laughed for actual minutes, whereas if the thing had tipped along the way and the team been at all fractious we might have been killed. When the mission came a week later to the parish church, he took Lutie and the children one night and again the next morning in the springwagon; there was no joking; they all went to confession and made the mission.

But as Lutie didn't drive or ride horseback, she seldom got to Mass. I took her one night to the bazaar; besides, I went with her to a brother's of J. J.'s; the report was that this brother who had been a long time dying was worse than ever, and J. J. was not at home; so we went, and found the man so bad that we had to stay till morning. Of course, it was the common thing to watch all night with sick people.

Nothing unless time was ever going to cure J. J. of drink. Surely Lutie was not going to do it, for she was too much like himself, good natured, fond of talk, ready to laugh, generous to a fault, a little haphazard, and vastly proud of his jokes. She only half scolded him, and no matter what he did or what she said her heart was always with him. When she was at her most serious, he laughed. He couldn't help this, and he did it only partly in self-defence; he really found almost everything funny. When she threatened at times to allow him a look at the bottle only once or twice a day, he laughed. He said she was trying to put him on rations,² as the wife of Larry Ryan, a companion of his, tried to do with the husband; and the wife hadn't succeeded, for the husband had said, "I don't think

² Pronounced with a short "a."

I'd like them rations, Missus." J. J. often repeated these words, and laughed. Then Lutie would relent, if the word isn't too strong, and laugh, too. Her liveliest threat was in part a promise.

The day I left him I carried straddle of the little mare a hedge doubletree, a gift from J. J. He had made it in less than an hour and with very skimpy tools.

I never saw him again. But I have heard a few things of him, and they are all just like him. When Larry Ryan, the old boon companion, was left without a thing in the world and was hungry and cold, J. J. loaded into the buggy not only meat and coal but an actual stove and set out through the snow toward the man's abode. Lutie, from whom I have this report, said, "My heavens, J. J., you're not going to take him a good stove!" All J. J. said was, "You wouldn't expect me to take the man a bad stove? We can spare this one." He was almost totally blinded for a while by the prohibition whisky, and he'd sit by the fire then and talk about "Larry's rations" and "coming in from the other side." And he made up a joke or two about his own present fix, not that he was bitter at all or ever complained. One of his new little jokes was, "I won't see anybody today," and another, "It was a blind pig that took the eyes out of me." Lutie loved to have him at home, just to listen to and to look at, and she enjoyed hearing again and again every one of the old stories from this man with the red nose and the bare white head who, in his own word, was tapering off on the drink.

For my part, I have only to say of him that if he liked liquor he had almost a passion for people, and if he was fond of himself he was at the same time head over heels in love with his family. As he went up the yellow hill, just two things seemed ever seriously to check him; these were the old two, liquor and people. And as he turned to go down, just one of these had any longer a notable place with him, and this one gave to the descent, itself fairly rapid, a simple and quite real human grace.

II

MEN BREAKING STUMPS

CHAPTER I

New Neighbors in Search of Land

IN THE early days, the great ambition was to get to Iowa where it was understood that the soil was strong and rich. "*Iowa Territory*—unparalleled in the fertility of her soil, her resources endless." So ran a toast in honor of the Governor on September 4, 1838. The custom was for people to come all summer long. Men driving ox teams hundreds of miles could hardly gauge so much as the season of their arrival, and we know that sometimes it took them the whole summer. That was the case with my mother's people and the group that drove from Ontario in the 'fifties. My father's father came directly from Cleveland; they worked their way, perhaps mostly by canal, downstate in Ohio, then came down the river by boat and up the Mississippi. This journey took approximately three weeks. As was then the way, they settled first near the river, but after the War they came another hundred miles to our neighborhood because the church was being built.

That's what brought many of our neighbors. A stone church was being built. The men quarried the stone, a hard sandstone that is more brown than gray, and hauled it four miles in ox carts. My grandfather may have been a particular help, for he is said to have been expert in the trade of foundryman, and was also a well-digger and of course a farmer; and he was one of the four or five who had horse teams. (As we children knew him, he was a neat little man and a neat workman who stayed close to home, drank whisky a few times a year, gave one beer-drinking in the summer, played euchre a little, danced and sang on Christmas Day, went to Mass once a week, and dearly liked his team of gray mares and their colts.) The church had been started in '59, but the walls were left as they were,

four or five feet high, when the men had to set out for the War; an old man whose family with one or two others was driven back from a non-Irish and non-Catholic settlement farther west, says the bigger boys used to jump up and climb over the wall, but he, himself, was too little to get hold of the top. To this day, the logs of the earlier church, logs that evidently were squared with an axe, form part of the walls of a barn or shed that is now ready to fall down.

A man who came in 1870 has often said that the main road was a cloud of dust most of the summer, from the covered wagons going west. This man's brother, the Jack-teen who is still plowing corn, came afoot and helped men to drive cattle.

But by our own time, that movement in wagons had totally stopped; never a covered wagon except a gypsy's, never an unknown mover's outfit. Any mover that came or went a distance made the trip in a box-car on the Burlington road which was completely built and double-tracked to Denver before I was born, though when my father came to the county it was, so he often told us, single-tracked and it stopped forty miles short of our town. After the turn of the century, not many new people came, just an uncertain dribble of settlers. The land was all taken, and for a long time no new claims were to be had; in fact, I talked to only one man, dead now a long time, who bought a forty directly from the government, a good sandy forty, too, but a little rough.

As late as 1909 a new family came to a farm just west of ours. In the first days of March, these new neighbors were moving into what was called the Dundon place; new snow was falling and drifting, and tufts of the old snow were yet on the ground. Because no one had occupied the place for three or four seasons, things were in a bad condition. Fences around the lots needed fixing, apple trees—and there had been good summer apples—had gone down, and burdock had grown up unmolested in the yard. Some of the people before the newcomers may have been good farmers, but a renter has to be much better than ordinary

if he is to look after the soil or the improvements. Things had gone to ruin and it was not a fit place for people to live. Discs and corn planters had been stored in the room, and coal shovelled into the kitchen. No family could move into that house, walking with rats, the windows boarded up, the weather still like the worst of winter. Two babies actually had died in the house, and the rumor spread that it was of diphtheria.

So Mr. and Mrs. brought their stuff there from the freight car: three work horses, some heifer calves and geese, wagons and cultivators, tables and bedding. Then they came and lived three or four days with us.

My older sister and I had been reading a book (because we didn't often have a book to read, we usually read together; neither of us can say now what that book was). "See," she said, "how much Missus is like the woman in the book; watch the way she talks." That was true enough; but Mr. didn't look like a man in any book; on the contrary, a very good book might look a little like a chapter out of him. Mr. was a midwesterner, a hard old hickory, ready for splitting rails, fit for the plow. And we have to say that it must have been a very good book that had a woman like Mrs. in it. Mr. and Mrs. teamed up well together.

They had children. The youngest was a girl of two and a half. They had a white-eyed, red-headed girl of six or seven, a dark lean boy nearly ten, and they were to have a baby late in the spring. But to us, as we first knew them, they were Mr. and Mrs. For a while, of course, they were the new neighbors, the new people on the Dundon place, then they gradually subsided into plain everyday Muck and Letty, and this is what they will always remain.¹

All the time that we have known Muck, and it's a good while, his clothes have been in shreds and patches. He has always run right through shirts and overalls. Letty could not keep clothes on him, and we don't know that she has

¹ "Muck" came in some roundabout way from Charles, and "Letty" from Loretto.

ever tried. He is only more or less covered. The shoulders and breast are half bared, and at times roughly scratched and bruised, as if he had gone naked through ripe corn-stalks or hazel or along hedges. It is too much to say that he is slashed and gouged, or that he is perpetually letting blood; but he is like that; he leaves strips of the overalls and perhaps of flesh on wire fences. And like the rest of us, he is always in old gunboat shoes, old when he has worn them a time or two in the mire of cowlots and piglots. The shoes naturally go the way of the feet, push out at one spot, curl up at another, like twisted sled-runners.

Often I have seen him walking on level land, his knees bent as if he were all the time climbing a hill or carrying a load; and it may be that he is. And when he does go up a hill, he appears to crawl on knees and toes. Winter and summer he has the same steadfast color, not a deep red but a kind of bay with a sprinkling of sand in the tangled brown hair.

Anything but a dapper little man, not nifty in gait or smooth in build, Muck has a slow, clumsy and genuine power. Once I saw him on a windy day in spring wrestling with pigs and steers in a muddy lot; he wanted to turn them out of the sloppy hog-yard and get them to a dryer spot, and he was as deeply plastered as they were. At last he had won; and the picture I have of him now, from that and other occasions, is one of rough strength: he is like a rusty hinge that creaks, and gives day by day, and yet stands for many a year; or he is like an unplaned barn-door that does not swing lightly or close at all points, yet stands strong and sure.

Muck and Letty came, lured by the promise of cheap rent, from down along old Crooked Creek, in Illinois; they thought they would be able to buy in a couple of years. Soon after Christmas, Muck had appeared unannounced and had rented the place when it was under snow and there was nothing to tell of its quality except the lie of the land and the word of neighbors, and a few hardy corn-stalks and cockleburrs reaching up out of the snow, and the

tumble-weeds rolled up against the hedges. He could give credentials, but he himself did not ask any; he trusted land and weather and God and people.

Letty was, then and always, out of breath. She had sinking spells, but she talked. At any instant, a person would swear she was ready to take the count and could scarcely be revived by a wink at the bottle, but she kept her feet and kept going. She could whip a mess of work out of her way. The two of them worked like horses, and turned out to be the roughest and best neighbors we ever had; at least, if the words roughest and best are taken together, no other neighbors could very well compare with them. And it is sure that we had many good neighbors, such as Big Man and Mary Ann and a dozen others, and some people would think almost any of them rough and ready.

When new neighbors came, people wanted to know one or two important things about them. Were they honest? They had better be! Were they friendly, and were they so friendly as to be pests? Sometimes people turned out to be dirty, yet surely the cleanliness of people was something that could be taken for granted. Well, Muck and Letty at once qualified. They minded their business, paid as they went, and were careful not to wear out their welcome. Muck was what we call a born Catholic and Letty was a convert; in any case, we felt at home with them.

Letty had a new way of making cheese. It was not a secret process; her face as colorless as water, her body pulled down like the body of a mare with colt, she worked away; she wanted to teach everybody, and nobody could be displeased with her good will. Yet even a layman might suggest she had made no great discovery, and might claim that the curds were less risky than the new cheese. Neither Muck nor Letty ever played cards, but she liked to dance, and they gave dances at which the whole neighborhood was welcome to dance, to play euchre, and to eat Letty's gooseberry and pumpkin pies.

They were wonderful to help, no matter how hard the work. It was as if that was what they came into the world

to do. Before a neighbor asked at all, they would come and do any kind of work for him and with him; she would scald the churn and see after the incubator, with her soul set on what the result would be; and Muck would fix up a fence or a gate, and likely as not he would never say a word about it; the neighbor's need was chance enough for him. He was a strong, rough-bodied man, and he loved people. Whenever a neighbor threshed, Muck was there early, he opened the stacks, and he never let up till the grain was scooped into the bin and the straw-pile was covered with slough-hay and weighted down with poles or rocks.

It is true that he could get hot under the collar; everybody soon knew this and allowed for it. He broke out into living flame once in a while, but really it was nothing, it was only the spurt of a match; a moment later he was, though out of wind, gentle and kind, his voice deep and quavering and mellow, his light blue eyes soft. The worst thing about him, at least when we first knew him, was his discouraged hours, and even so he enjoyed being consoled, and the greatest good in his own day was in bringing comfort to people.

When a man fell from the fork-track of a new barn, Muck rose from a sick bed and went like a wild man across the fields on an old plug, bareback, to the man who as a matter of fact was then almost a total stranger to him. It was New Year's Eve, the ground was frozen solid, and the two of us who were deputed to stay with Letty till he came home saw him come home at midnight and eat a gooseberry pie and drink a pot of coffee. He said. "Poor Stevie! To fall like that, there alone in the barn, and not a soul to help him but his one sister!" The words shook up out of Muck, and he used his favorite expressions: "By gol! And Stevie is such a g-good fellah!" Before daylight the next morning, Muck and Letty were on the road to Mass and to receive Holy Communion; they weren't going to miss, least of all on New Year's Day and when the poor neighbor was not able to go.

That's what they liked, not raising a bumper crop or shipping a carload of hogs to Chicago, but helping a man who was out of luck. As they saw it, that was not only the right thing but the normal thing. Life itself was for this kind of neighborliness; the fact was as clear as sun and moon and stars.

We were all poor people, on every side of town, and those who were renting and moving needed no wagons to haul their money. Muck and Letty made no pretense to wealth. They came with their pockets slack; if they had a bit of cash, they may have kept it and actually have added to it in the best times, but with the times still good or ordinary and with themselves toiling they probably began to slip a little down the hill. Like all of us poor farmers, they dealt—if they dealt at all—in third-rate canners and feeders, and not as a matter of choice. And the Lord knows that every calamity comes to poor farmers; the well runs dry, they get caught with land that sours or won't drain, the hog market starts down at the wrong time, the cash rent comes around much too quickly on them.

Now it is hard to say what odds and ends of misfortune hit Muck and Letty from one side or another. And the signs were on them. Clothes became skimpy, the house sometimes looked as if it had been robbed, and when they had produce they were so generous and whole-hearted that they did not run to sell it but put it on the table. It was almost as if they were looking for someone on whom to bestow things. So money was gone before it came, and any tramp was welcome to a share of the food they had. Muck was always turning his pockets inside out to get half a pipe of tobacco, and Letty often had a time of it, after the middle of summer, to get enough cream together for a churning.

When they first came to us, and it's hitting around thirty-two years now, Muck and Letty seemed to us children an old man and woman. Well, they have grandchildren now this good while, but are not old people, not snowed under, not by a long way. Each of them can yet do

a day's work, or a season's work. Of course, Letty is wind-broken as she always was, but she can climb a big hill if given moderate time, and though we may suppose she does not dance any more it is safe to bet she could do a turn or two. What is known is that on a summer morning not long ago she churned at five, walked a mile and a half to church, and after Mass appeared in the sacristy with a jar of the buttermilk under her arm. Neither the work nor the jaunt was too hard on her, because for a lifetime she has loved to do such things.

Muck appears like himself of thirty years ago. It is true that his face is now without the beard and is like a plowed hillside gutted and ditched with rains, and he is stooped at the shoulders and bent at the knees, but the rest of him stands fairly straight. When we see him ride an old white horse without saddle and with a kind of rope bridle, or hear him rattle along with team and rig, what we have to say is that he is not a knocked-out man. All his life long, he has known how to sit behind the kitchen stove on a winter day, or day after day, and rest up; and he never knew what hate was or is; so perhaps he will wear much better than men who were more neatly set up, but loved man less; he says that God means that every man should have something to suffer. In short, Muck remains a strong man hard to keep in clothes; he can raise good corn if he gets rain; his teeth are worn small but he has enough of them left to manage to munch at a mouthful of granger-twist. When in 1934 the lean times and the drought were combined and might be thought to be at their peak, he said that he had always had good neighbors and had no complaint to make against God or man.

Long ago, when Muck was already mature in years, I heard a quite young man tell him that no man ever need be poor: "not any more, old fellow." Muck was not tolerant of that idea, "never need be poor," and though he would be tolerant of it now, he still wouldn't believe it.

They were well met, as we used to say, the two of them, Muck and Letty. In many ways he must have seemed to

most people a memorable person, and in fact a genuinely remarkable person; he had a hollow Lincolnesque jaw, a big chin, and a big mouth with the corners tipping up. Besides, he was probably boss of the farm. But there is no use saying Muck without Letty, or Letty without Muck, and none of their friends ever does say one or think of one without the other. They are a pair after all, a matched team, and if possibly a person might not have said fifty years ago that they were simply born to go together, they certainly have gone well and happily together; neither one could have done much of the going alone; and it would seem strange now to any of their friends to think of them as ever having been for a week of their lives apart. At any rate, from the first day we ever knew them, they have smoothly managed their small cooperative.

Certain kinds of trees, such as running-oak and crab apple, grow, not in, but out of, our clay hills; that is the case on Big Man's rough forty, on much of the Mary Ann place, and on The Granger's poorer land. And yet it is hard to say. Maybe the hills grow out of the trees, the two are so close, so native to each other. Well, Muck and Letty have remained like that, and it is only half the truth to say that they are partners. For when a person met one, he certainly met the other, though the other might not be seen, especially by a stranger. And he wouldn't want to make up his mind too quickly which was the hill, and which the rooted running-oak or wild apple.

Muck was one person, and Letty another. But without the other, each would have been notably different, and likely would not have been at all. One of the good things of our life is to have known and still to know the two together, the two as one.

CHAPTER II

Brings a Farm Out of the Brush

MUCK could work and talk, or sit down and talk half a day, but what Letty preferred was to work as she puffed and talked. And just across the field from them for half his life was the stump man, a man who loved to talk, at work or at rest. He'd sit and look at nothing, his small round eyes nearly shut, or he'd move along at his hard work, giving a deft hand to it, and all the time he talked.

At the first look we can see what this man has done: he has made an Iowa farm. But he started with nothing, and he had first to get a little cash if he was ever to lay claim to any land.

When he was a mere boy, he let his wiry curls grow out full, crowned himself with a hard hat, and started going with the girls. This lively little dude came of what we call a marrying family, and people knew just what he would do: after a look or two at the girls, he married.

His equipment was meagre—a cow and a yearling heifer, a sow with pig, a pair of old mules and a roan mare, harness that could be kept together with rivets and wire, a plow and a corn-plow. He made a drag or harrow out of brush weighted down with rocks. He knew the necessary things, and knew there are hundreds of nick-nacks and odds and ends that a man can do without.

Where he went to work first was on bottom land, and he made things go. Now on the bottoms, a man takes a chance; it's always a gamble whether in a particular year he will raise anything at all. This is because in a wet year the water stands on the bottom as it does in a bog, and in that case the washed-in soil, the cream of the surrounding hills, cannot be farmed. And even in a favorable season a man does not dare to put a team into the bottoms till

toward the end of May and often not till the tenth of June. He has to run the chance. But the soil is so good that it makes up for lost time; for once the corn has gone into the ground and made a start, it shoots up like fire; as the first Irish settlers wrote home, "It grows while you sleep." In fact, it grows night and day, and the saying now among the people is that you can see and hear it grow. Sun is all it needs now, hot days and hot nights, and with corn on the hilly ground beginning to suffer, the corn on the bottoms shows what it means to do.

If a man ran into a wet year, his bottom land wouldn't put much corn into the cribs for him that fall. But the farmer I speak of struck it lucky, though one way or the other he could not have lost much, as he did not have much. The weather was dry or nearly dry for three seasons running, and the only drawback was the long delay in the spring and early summer, for until the crop is planted a man cannot be content, and on low ground he is not reasonably sure till out into July which way the weather is going; a series of pourdowns then, and a man is through for that summer.

Things came this farmer's way. Not that he fell into crops and money as some people fall into fat; what it takes on any of our farms is spunk and intelligence, and an incredible amount of work. But he missed no chances, and friends also came down from the hills when their own corn was showing through the ground and these helped him to get the land, now at last dry enough to work, plowed and planted.

He knew how to make things move. At work, he knew no let up, and cracked the whip over the black mules and the roan mare, and took plenty out of them, for the hottest place to work is in the bottoms, surrounded by hills, where even the creeks are lined with willows that grow thick. That's where the sun comes straight down, and a breeze rarely strikes, so that what is good for corn may at times be bad for men and mules.

In three years this young farmer raised much more corn

than ordinary, and got to selling a wagon load of fat shoats every couple of weeks, and for a man who read little he kept a close watch on what the hog market did. But the third year he nearly got the liver scared out of him. That was a late year even on the hills and prairie, and it was out into June before that man was able to turn a furrow. Of course, his crop made up time, but the quality was nothing to brag about as the corn on the bottom did not get out of the way of the frost.

That taught him something; he saw what could happen close to the creek, and he went back into the hills and bought a rough timber-place. Not that he was scared so far back from the creek: he might have stopped on a cleared hill farm, or gone out on the prairie, but he was warned and he had also hit into what he thought a bargain in a brushy farm in the hills.

His new farm had next to no bottom land on it, and not much cleared land. The farm was all right, for he knew what to do with it.

There he is, ever since, clearing the land. One little corner, just a ridge and some hillsides, was in hay when he got it, and even these hillsides were half naked and would have to be seeded down at once, as they were running to spots and ditches. Nearly all the rest was in timber and hazelbrush, and made something less than poor pasture. In most places the soil itself was good, if a man could only manage to get to it.

Whatever else he did, there was one thing he had to do: he had to set to work clearing. Time would tell; the man would either give up or make a farm. So he bent himself to it; winter and summer he stayed at the axe. What he needed was a farm, and he could cut it out of these hills of timber.

At the start he had to build a shack of a house over into something the family could live in. He also flattened the sides of whiteoak logs and built a barn and a crib and put shingle roofs (instead of slough-grass) on them, he fenced off a cow pasture and a hog pasture, and for this he had

to buy new hog-tight wire; he cleaned out a spring in the east forty, and brought a well-digger to the place to dig and tile between the house and barn. While all this was going on, he moved to the new place his wife and two white-headed little girls, and settled down for life.

Because he had no fields yet for corn, it was as if he had no farm. A man must make land on a stump farm. Down must come the native oaks and crabs and elms, and the undergrowth of hazel and buckbrush must be scythed to the ground. Then a man can plow; that is, he can if he knows how to do it. But it is gigantic labor, and the learning is itself costly. A man takes jolts that run up from the plow and the handles through his arms and into his body at the shoulders, he gets jabbed and pounded from all sides, often he is thrown out of the furrow and onto the land and back again into the furrow. But this stump man learnt. He had to learn the roughest of all games, how to break stumps.

And all the time he kept deadening trees, girdling them in the light of the moon any time all summer but preferably in August, and leaving the gray and brown skeletons of them stuck into the air, bleached bodies, unburied bones; he had to keep sprouting last year's stumps; and of course he made a steady use of fire. We may be sure the green stumps stayed there in the soil, the oak with roots spreading out from thirty to fifty feet, the elm with three or four roots like underground trees, the hickory with a taproot as hard as steel, the hazel roots matted into clumps.

The team was good enough in the bottoms, but here it gave him trouble. The roan was nervous—in fact she was born of a branded mare; and the mules were too light, and still he had to do with them for the first season. The man himself as well as the team had to be broken. In the bottoms the soil packs, it lies down level, and the only hindrance to the plow is the cornstalks rotting from last year's crop. It's a different story in stumps and roots and brush. The stump man found out also that a go-devil, which is a sharp cutter stuck straight down like a beam, has to be

sent on ahead; it marks the way for the plow and gives the plowman a chance to tear and root his way through. So he had to rent or borrow a light team and hire a boy for the go-devil.

Mid-June caught him the first year with only three or four acres turned over, and more or less ready for corn. But one way or another he raised enough corn that year to get him through the winter, to feed the team and chickens and a few pigs fenced into a lot made of rails. He was not farming, he was laboring and getting ready to farm. The next year he was on top of fifteen acres of the stump land. And soon he was seeding it back to clover, and making decent hay ground and pasture of what had been timber four or five years before. In time he got to checking the corn, instead of drilling it in, and that means he had the stumps and roots nearly gone off the land. At last, he has almost all of the place fit for whatever he pleases: corn or wheat or white clover; and if it wasn't for the times, maybe he'd be looking over the fences at new timber to lay level with the earth and new forties of stumps to roll up butt-end to the sun.

Often I have met this man, in his own fields as a rule or at his own house, and I know something of how he stands with the world. Nothing is farther from his mind than ever to move so much as half a mile from where he is now settled, a few cows and pigs around him, a Ford to get him out to the big road. He is yet and always at work. As a boy he was a wrestler, and he is strong now, a thick-set shock of a man, deep through the chest, shelving off at the shoulders, and when his face and hands and overalls are plastered with sweaty dust it is hard to tell at a distance whether he is a man or one of the girdled trees that the wind has stumped off at the height of a man's head.

"What do you think now?" he'll begin. Or, "Do you know what I heard?" But if no one has news, he'll readily enough make up something. He sees fun in every hill and ditch and tree, and he is making up jokes when he is alone and telling them where there is any one to listen.

He did not go to the War, as it was judged by experts that he was producing food. The story of the exemption, as told by himself, is like this. A neighbor of a dry hard look was one of two asked to witness to the fact that this man was a good farmer. The officials demanded of the dry hard man what the farmer had done on that farm, that he should be exempt. The dry hard one said quickly, in a high tight voice, "He brought the farm out of the brush." Then they asked what would happen if the farm was abandoned for a year or two, and the answer, truly enough, was, "It would go back into the brush."

The stump man is fond of another incident in the dry hard neighbor's life. One election day a candidate was passing out the cigars and saw the dry hard man, a mere pack of bones, the barest bones a living man ever bore. The candidate recovered his campaign poise and said, "Mr. Conly, have you voted?" The dry one knew the other's thought, and said, "Yes, they still let me vote—and run loose."

The winter of '17-'18 saw the stump man slashing into the timber and making props for mines and incidentally making land. He says he used to tire of that work, but soothed himself with the refrain: "Making the world safe for autocracy! . . . Making the world safe for autocracy!"

The War won, he was breaking brush all day long up and down the side of an enormous hill, his old pair of horses, hitched to a double-tree hewn from hedge, easing the plow into a rock or a hidden root with the sense got from long practice, and the man himself knowing from the feel on the plow handles what he has struck. There I came to him one May morning just as the plow point hit something hard. "What do you think that is?" he asked.

I suggested that it might be hazel root or green elm.

"If you hit green elm like that," he said, "you'd move the whole hill. That's crab-apple. I wish Hoover was here now to help get us out of this fix—he's an engineer, you know. Here's buckbrush: the team walks right through

it; and iron weed: it's like oat stubble, once you're used to stumps."

Asked how far a neighbor who plowed with a tractor would get on this stumpy hill, he answered quickly, "He couldn't get in here." He leaned against the plow and the hill, and it was as if plow and hill and man were one. As I left, he asked how I'd like to try a life of stumping, and told me, in case I'd ever get a monopoly on railroads and steel, not to charge double prices for go-devils and breaking plows.

That night three of us played cut-throat till eleven, sun-time. He is a good player, but not his best in three-hand because in this each one plays mostly without a partner and thus without signals. Hard times and all, he and the neighbors have kept playing; they are ready nearly any night for a hand.

They play baseball also and softball, and follow big baseball and football. One year I visited him on the Fourth; in the morning he was running¹ for the "third and last" time some tall corn close to the house, just below the lot and crib (he still uses a spring-trip walking plow, for he cannot be sure that any piece of his land is one hundred per cent free of roots). At ten-thirty his wife came out to tell him the score: "Sox five to three behind in the seventh; playing Detroit, you know, at Detroit. One on, and none out. . . . No, Detroit's at bat. Hurry now and get through; we want to get to the picnic by noon."

This man, removed two or three generations from the old sod, might be thought not Irish. But he has the Irish look: in the set of his shoulders, in the way he carries the middle part of his body, and in the nose and forehead coming out evenly far; that is, the forehead coming out too far, or the nose not far enough. And when the K of C's were started, he and his wife—whether from contrariness or the "strong nature" in them—at once joined the Hibernians.

¹The common word is "plowing" corn, but we also say "running" it and we understand the old word "cultivating."

Besides, though he never drinks, he likes dancing and singing. As soon as he shakes free of his work in the evening, he turns on the radio, as if he hadn't labored at all, and dances then with his second daughter, a tall white-haired girl with eyes as round and as light-blue as his, a good little voice for singing, and cheeks like wild roses. If the wife stops his brogues at the door, he says, "All right, Ma," and dances in his stocking feet. Every program is in his mind, and he keeps turning the dial. He says, "Here's Des Moines now," then mumbles, "That's Shenandoah. . . . Here's KMOX, that's St. Louis. At first, we wanted nothing but jazz or swing, but we wouldn't listen to it now." Once I went with him to a neighbor's; the only one at home was a young girl, and he asked her to play the organ and he did a jig, stooping over and looking down and clapping his hands.

A ready and lively talker, the stump man is able to make the most of news, and likes to tell things in the style of the old rural weeklies. He will say: "Georgetown folks will be surprised to learn that Ed Hyns (better known as Shorty) was robbed of a considerable sum of money on Road 34 west of Albee Tuesday night." But his love of fun demands freedom, and he says: "Only a merchant would be worth robbing; a farmer wouldn't have anything."

"Do you know what I hear?" he says then through his teeth, his little eyes closing, his head cocked to one side. "They say Uncle Sam is hard up—maybe that's who robbed Shorty!"

At every turn he makes up his jokes. When his wife is ready for the state fair and asks him to bring the bag to the car, he pretends he cannot: it's so packed with precious things. He tugs at it with one hand and then the other, his rounded shoulders sagging toward the floor. "I can't!" he says in a surprised and final tone. "I can't do it. Call the porter."

During the famous drought of '34, he squinted at the sky every morning and at last said in a casual and quiet

way, "If it don't rain pretty soon, we'll have to tell Franklin D. and see if he can't do something about it." When Wilson asked us all to move our clocks ahead so as to save daylight and win the War, this man said he had never lost any daylight. The wife, however, wanted to be patriotic, and offered to compromise and move the clock up half an hour—as the priest actually had done with the church clock trying to please all parties. "Well," said the stump man looking serious, "if it comes to that, we'll turn the clock around and let it face the wall."

One night I sat talking with him in the kitchen till twelve. He was in his bare feet, sitting in the corner on the floor, his back hunched against the wall, and as usual he was next door to being out of smoking and chewing. He repeated many stories: about the man who told of bringing a farm out of the brush, about a neighbor who always responded to news with "Ah, get away!" and at last about an old neighbor who had been killed on the tracks. He imitated each one he spoke of: with a tight little voice, and then a kind of nudging tone; and he was glad to have some one to listen. It was past one when we rolled into bed, and before five he rolled out, and in a minute or two was saying, "Ma! We're around a little late this morning."

He was not getting ready to conquer stumps, not any more, for he had them all conquered long ago and had the last of them rotting away in bony piles in the ditches. But farming, especially on the hills, demands work and vigilance. That kind of land has to be made, and to be kept well made.

CHAPTER III

By Main Stren'th and Awkwardness

OUR next man, at least as spare as the lean humanist, knows how to make land and to keep it made. Not rich prairie land, nor long stretches of washed-in bottom land, but the treacherous hillsides where a man has more rock than soil.

John Nolan knows how to work and work, how to look after cattle, how to live with his neighbors. Like all of our Irish people, he says: "Lord knows." Or, "Lord pity that fool of a man!" But some things, he knows, neither work nor prayer will do. A good man works hard, and prays hard; and at that, there are things he can not do. Well, he will in that case let them go. Something else can be done.

The records in the county paper—which may have been a trifle biased—show that our people were Irish farmers and that they sometimes drank whisky. News "gathered by the Melrose Plaindealer" was published on February 1, 1877 as follows:

"John Doyle has a Poland China hog weighing 1,100 lbs. that cost him \$250.00.

"Michael Early intends to raise the Shamrock saloon building to two stories, and build in the rear, during the coming spring, and will keep hotel in connection.

"Mrs. James Campbell died of congestive fever, and two weeks later her daughter, aged 22, of same."

That year the report for the Fourth as spent in our original parish was this: "The celebration of the Fourth at Stacyville is reported to have been a very pleasant affair. The good work of Father Ryan in the cause of temperance was exemplified in the fact that no intoxicating liquor

of any kind was sold anywhere about the grounds and not a drunken man was seen there."

The cause of temperance has had its ups and downs to this day, and we have known Irish and others who drank rivers of hard liquor. One man when he drank—which was often—called himself "Tommy-o," and was ready then to pull square-hold, to wrestle, to run horses or to hitch double-trees with anyone; that is, to hitch his team at close range to another team, and to let the teams pull till one was pulled over. At times he would offer to fight, but it is unlikely that any man ever faced him, for he was a bull of a man and so strong that he had the reputation of being able to take the biggest rake-load of hay that any man could haul and in three swipes of the fork pitch every wisp of it onto the stack. They say he more than once 'loped his team with a ton of hay on the wagon. And at times when he drank, he sang:

"Wild and woolly
And full of fleas!
Never was curried
Below the knees!"

This was a challenge; he was daring any man to hit him.

John Nolan drank, too. But vigorous and raw and Irish though he was, he had control and had also a philosophy of the place of drink in man's life.

Once I saw him on a Sunday after Mass drinking with a neighbor. His son met me and asked, "Have you seen m'father?"

Yes, I had, below at the hitchrack, "him and another man; and you can't guess what they were doing." But the son could, and he did. It is true that John tasted whisky, as the topers said of themselves; yet he never took too much. "A drop of that, now," he said, "wouldn't hurt any man, on a cold day, or if he'd be home to rest of an evening. But it's running around and staying out—it's then the whisky's bad."

This man John has never been soft. And on our hills,

pulling at plows and chopping into oak, he grew harder. Work under the sun and in fresh soil takes something out of a man of course, and it also gives something to him. It bends his back, and if he watches closely it may earn him a living and a long life. The work itself is good; it is something that man may cherish almost as his own body. Muck and Letty, among others, took to hard work, and they got lots of it. So did the stump man; he was never yet seen looking for easy ways. And this third neighbor, John Nolan, whom these others actually surrounded in their moving from farm to farm, was as tough and as ready for the plow and the axe as any of them.

This man John has a bony Irish face, reddish pink as if skinned. The nose is thin and straight, the eyes small and gray-blue and set well back into the head; the top of the ears, like a broncho's, folded in a bit. His look is so earnest as to be nearly stretched and tense, yet he can laugh. The chin is two-pointed, and would perhaps be dimpled if the man were rounded out at all or anything but spare. The mid-jaws are, and always were, hollow and sunken as if he had no teeth or gums, and the cheek bones seem abnormal and the jaws stand out at the turns like fists. He is a hard, uncompromising man, Irish to be sure, but gone totally native among us. The hair is sparse and cottony, and in front only a foretop of it is left. But it is not white and will never be white, just a steel or an iron-gray, like the color of a horse that holds his own, winter and summer, and refuses to tan.

About the eyes the flesh is puckered from living in the weather: day by day in the zero or near-zero weather, day by day in the torrid sun. The rest of the face is wrinkled as much as is possible for flesh so tight to the bone, but it is not withered and it won't wither. The hands have calluses like bone; the fingers are long and strong and partly closed in an uneven way as if about to gather up something or to take hold of a pig's leg or a plow handle.

Through the chest and in the arms and shoulders and legs the man is lean and hard, and rather strong than

smooth in look and movement. Seated on a chair, at work on a drill or planter, or half lying on the ground, he has an uncomfortable way about him, and a stranger would take him to be on his guard and ready to leap to his feet in a wink.

The lips are a trifle thin and a noticeable bit watery, and his laugh, with no smile midway to it, tends to be sudden and explosive; it comes from deep in the throat. His gestures as he speaks are made mostly with a rapid shuttling of the mouth, and the head going up and down, though when he laughs the eyes twinkle.

Words with him are direct and are never wasted; they say one thing and mean it. Once I talked to him about how to transplant big trees and get them to survive; I said I heard the way was to trim them without mercy. "Sure," he said. "Then the roots won't have so much to do." Another day he told some of us about one of the oldest men of the neighborhood as he first knew him: "When Mike Collins came here, he was the biggest dude ever I saw. A stand-up collar, a dude hat, and the pants creased as flat as a piece of paper!"

He is not much for the styles himself. On cold Sundays, he comes to Mass wearing two pairs of overalls, a home-made shirt and a home-made jacket, and until recent years he and one or two others wore a hay rope as a belt for the overcoat. His house and his team or car have always been common, have been for his use and his people's use. The food has been plain, too, for strong, healthy men and women who have work to do. Until three or four sons grew up, he was boss at home, and he could have been a vigorous mean one if his power had not been checked by a real care for others. And at that, the story is that when the oldest boy was caught chewing, the father forced him to take a plug of Horseshoe and almost make a meal of it.

A lean old farmer, himself rough, told me that this sharp-nosed man was the best neighbor he ever had. He cited three or four matters to prove the point: the man said little, but people knew what he meant and what he

would do, and when a neighbor teamed with him he pulled his share of the load. But the main thing was that he never refused to go on a neighbor's note.

Then one day I told this shell-bark what his friend had said of him. For a moment he said nothing, he sat there sharp and stiff on the chair. Then he said suddenly, "Well, the best neighbor ever I had was Old Man Wallace, old Jimmie. The dry year,¹ everybody was running to Malone's Spring. They drove the cattle there—that's what they had to do, men and herds of cattle dying of thirst; and they hauled barrels of water away in wagons. But I went every day to Jimmie's well, and every day I saw the water getting lower. Then says I one morning, 'I won't be coming here any longer for water.' 'And why not?' says he. 'Because,' says I, 'it's nearly gone and you need it yourself. I'll go to the Spring with the others tomorrow.' 'Well,' says he, 'when you go there, I'll go there, but we'll use the last of this first.' Now, that's what I call a good neighbor, a man who would split the last drop of water with you."

This man—they say—can be bullheaded and hard to handle. He minds his business, and he expects others to mind theirs. What he hates and has to hate is any dishonesty, fakery, two-facedness. He does not say this, of course, but simply does outright what he means. Once he was driving cattle, bought that day at a sale, along the road just at dark, and a tourist struck and killed one of them. Now to others the stranger did not seem a bad man, and he only said that however the loss was settled he must proceed at once.

"Devil a go then!" said the sharp-nosed man. "Not one step do you go from here till the sheriff comes to this spot." The stranger wanted to know how he was going to be kept, and got this reply: "By main stren'th and awkwardness." He did not go.

The Irish wake has had an evolution among us. Sometimes—or let us say, in some instances—it was not only a religious and social event but a mild carousal, and a man

¹ Probably in the '80's.

called the jigger-boss was put in charge; he was really the bar tender. But that kind of wake was never common, and has disappeared. The wake now with us is one of our greatest social moments; it is deeply religious, and the older men and women regularly plan their own wakes and funerals in detail. We saw how Big Man did this. The lean humanist's daughter also did it. And our father when he was dying said: "You know you can't have the beads said too often at a wakehouse," and he told us—as if we did not know—who were the best ones to lead the beads: "Susie Feehan, if she comes, but you know her mother is sick . . . and among the men, well, Rich Malone maybe . . . you know his mother was famous at leading the beads."

At the wake we asked John Nolan, a friend of our father's, if he would lead the beads. He would, but he said: "There's lots here could do it better. I don't know the Mysteries." At that word he leaped up, like an animal out of the straw, bits of the cut grass sticking to him, and headed for the house, and there he knelt without support and as straight as a stick while he said the beads. Now, as everyone knows, to say the beads is to say a series of Paters and Aves, and to meditate on some of the great Gospel events. So that is what John and the whole people did. It is true that he couldn't name the "mysteries" and he'd say bluntly, "The first mystery, the meditation," and leave it to the people to supply the mystery in the case, such as the Resurrection or the Incarnation. But he prayed in a sharp tone that carried throughout the house and must have reached everyone outside. "I believe in God the Father almighty . . . Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done . . . the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou. . . ."

Fifty and sixty years ago this lean iron man, all his bones sticking out akimbo, was racy and of our Iowa soil, and he is his own plain self to this day. He had always been up-to-date. He borrowed money then, at something in effect like twenty per cent interest, to buy a team of horses and also to

send passage money so that his father could come from Ireland. And now, though of course he himself was born in Ireland—he is one of the two of our people left who were born abroad—and though he never has gotten entirely over the accent, he thinks and speaks in terms of tractors, Secretary Wallace, the Reds and counter-Reds, and the eventual fate of the pig. If need be, he could revert, without making faces, to the wagon and horseback and trading, and one may say in passing that something like that may well be what the farmer will yet have to do.

Nobody catches our lean friend heartsick over the old days, the good old days, or worried and afraid of the new. He has always been a man of his time. Things have turned over and over, and perhaps sometimes turned back; but it seems that for him it is almost as if nothing had changed, because he has changed and kept up, and his mind is yet supple enough to bend and shift on occasion with events. The truth is, he has continually gambled in futures, and never in the past; that is the way he has been so nimble as to keep up. When other people's talk takes a natural turn backward or when he is asked, he will speak of the old days which he knows as well as anyone does; otherwise for him the past is mostly a closed book.

Well, he knows he can't hold out, and he says he sees the undertaker taking a good look at him now, as if his turn was not too far off. And even so, he is not going to enter any dotage; his life has been a one-way movement, and it is not likely that he will ever revert to a golden age of his youth. What has been, has been; it is locked up and put away, and will never be opened. The wife was sick for fifty years; yet neither of them was ever badly discouraged, and neither of them ever came close to being defeated. In spite of her sickness and in spite of the fact that he broke an arm or a leg almost every year during that time, he is into the eighties, and she did not fall far short of them. She was very quiet, peaceful and orderly; he was firm, orderly and vigorous; they simplified their lives, their children's

lives, their home, their worship, their work, their tending to crops and cattle. Perhaps that simpleness and evenness of life, that honesty, that being like little children toward each other and toward their own and toward all people, has had the effect of giving them serenity, calmness and sureness in the face of trouble, a magnificent trust in the future before God and man. If life has not always been all that it should have been, the fault was not with this man or this woman. Without excitement, without over-anxiety they have taken all the pains they could, and have never fundamentally been afraid of anything, of times or storms or men.

The lean, sharp-nosed man has seen the hardest times. He came to this land in the first place, like so many others, with his hands empty, he worked for other people whom he never hated, he helped build the railroad, got a hold of rough land, risked the ordinary setbacks, cleared and plowed and bluegrassed a big farm of steep timbered hills, peopled it with children and cattle, lost a child or two through smallpox and pneumonia, came on inch by inch and had an actual grip on the land before the wave of prosperity during the War gave him a boost, had in his household a full share of the bitterest luck about which he talks frankly, had of course measles and pox and broken legs, was often enough, one would think, on the verge of going down, and if he had gone down he would have known what to do: start at the bottom like a youth; but in fact he grabbed whatever handle the moment offered, and kept his head up and his courage out in front. One way or another, he has gone through a whole series of hard times, and almost every decade he had a low or two, but he is today as always a man of ready heart, and his knees have never wobbled.

Plenty of shocks—that's what this tough man has had to absorb. And at this late day he could stand yet more of them. He never figured that a man's life is all smooth going, and in his own case at any rate the figuring was

correct. In his death, too, he will be precisely as he has been in life, unbeaten, with no complaint, owing no man a dollar, owing and showing fear to no man, and at that decisive moment he will be, as he always has been, a man of his time.

CHAPTER IV

They Play the Fiddle and Have Danced

WE GET more native as we go. And yet any outsider would notice at once our accent, our noses and our chins.

Just one farm removed from the man eternally of his time are three men on a hill. It is a poor, ditched farm between him and them, not much of it at any time plowed or worth plowing, much of it prop land that has been cut over and abandoned. But close as they are to this gulchy place, the three men on a hill are excellent farmers and they make something of their own bad land. The truth is, they bought their farm piece by piece when farms were costly and hard to get; and in these times when good farms are going for a song, perhaps they should have closed out, and taken their choice of a dozen first-rate farms.

Well, they know their business; our only point is that, as they say, good land talks whereas a bad sour soil of white and yellow clay has to be petted and coaxed; it has no life or vigor in it.

The youngest of these three men is what we call a "scarce-of-fat." He is up to six foot four, and is like a windmill. He is as slender as a rail, and somehow gives the impression of being pointed. The shoulders are stooped just a little, but the head is thrown back, as if to even up that matter. His knees and elbows are as sharp as teeth. Of a leggy horse, not yet bodied down, we say that there is too much daylight under him; and if this man went on all fours, that is what we should have to say of him. But thin as he is, he does not wobble or give at all, not even when he hurries, and he can do twelve hours of work a day all summer long.

As a child he was tall and thin. We have an old photo of the children at the Tick Ridge School; two fat little boys

hold a slate with the date inscribed in chalk: November 4, 1906. Our tall friend, of course, is evident there; his face is as sharp as a knife, he is in short pants that show white, a shirt that shows black, and long suspenders that seem to touch his body only at the shoulders. It is a good picture, the teacher in a long black dress, herself also very thin, one hand hidden behind her back; there are eight or nine boys, most of them in overalls, and just two girls, their arms linked, and each of them with a curl brought around under her chin.

To this day, any clothes that are to fit the tall man have to be odd and special sizes. A shirt lean enough for him would be a child's shirt and would strike him in the middle of the back; a shirt "for slim men" and actually long enough for this man looks like a sheet hung on a couple of sticks. No one has ever seen him in everyday sleeves that got near to his wrists, and it always seems as if he could walk around inside the overalls.

This man knows soybeans and kaffir corn. But his main crops are just four, two in the fields and two in the lots. These four are corn and clover, hogs and beef cattle. He and the brothers are good feeders; that is, they know how to make hogs and cattle grow fast and big and then to fatten smoothly, so as to hit near the peak of the market. And he is more than a topnotch farmer. He plays the fiddle, he goes to all the basketball games, if he has to he can play euchre, he dances, and he has made up his mind that some day soon he will bring home a bride. What we surely must say is that he plans a home and family and a complete life.

And he is a good cook. At any rate, that is what I and some of the neighbors would say. His own verdict is put now in a brief formula. He says: "Anything cooked by a woman tastes good to me."

Not long ago he asked me by personal messenger to come to his house for supper. The messenger was his oldest sister, the leanest woman in the world, and what she said was, "Louis wants to know if I think he could cook a supper

good enough for you. And do you know what I said? I told him I had better come down and help."

That was not his own answer, and it was not mine. He really knows how to set a table, to boil potatoes, and to wash the dishes.

Early on the day of the supper I went to visit some people in town.

Then I went again, this time in a car with a friend, to the state road and along the backbone of the region called Buzzards' Roost, and down past the empty shacks of one of the many coal mining towns that have turned into ghost towns. This is the way to the county seat where the two of us visited people. By four o'clock we started home on the south road, a road that is all ridge once the car gets up to it.

The driver was a tall tree of a man who has these roads broken by turns and events and persons. He said, "do you know Gus Saunders, the auctioneer? Old Gus, I mean. . . . Well, that's where his second girl lives, married to a miner, right down that path. . . . It is pretty weedy; a miner won't cut weeds. . . . Did you ever see the crisscross tree? It's a whiteoak or maybe burroak, it's hard to tell which; the two arms cross straight over, then up a little way, five feet I'd say, they cross right back. Here it is now, half way down that slope to the left. Do you want to stop and take a look at it? Do you want to take a picture of it? . . .

"They say this is the best piece of dirt road in Iowa; a road'd sure go some to beat it. . . . It was somewhere along this patch that Dinny Kearns¹ tried to outrun a stray steer or to let the steer outrun him, and he couldn't do either, darn'd if he could. The steer'd run along, about so far ahead, in the grader ditch, and Dinny was afraid the thing would turn across the road on him. But when he stepped on the gas, the steer stepped on the gas, and when he stopped dead the steer stopped and looked at him. Believe it or not, they kep' that up from here to Algy Repp's

¹ The Granger, some one driving for him; the name is pronounced "Kairns."

corner, and I won't say, 'cause I don't know, which was most scared."

We bounced into the driver's yard; geese squawked out of our way and calves looked up from the bones of yesterday's fodder. The driver said he would run me over to Louis' house, but had to stop first and water everything. When the time came, the car had no more stir or life in it than a wagon, and we went on horseback.

Louis' brother Jim is also a farmer, wise man and fiddler, and a good judge of stock. The family at home in the old days was five boys and four girls, and every one of them was a wit. But Jim's special turn is for literary values. He went to work when he was thirteen, then after a spell of sickness he got to return one winter to school, and the teacher gave him a story to read. He read it and often re-read it, four or five times a winter, and he means to start reading it again. He says, "I misplaced that story, somehow or other." The story was the Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Not long before, I had received a letter from Jim. This is what he wrote: "Will ans now. . . . Read your article on the Theory of the Pig. Well, it was fine. I think you are giving them fellows too much for the money. Had I been there when you were writing that, I would of made you sell that butchering part separate . . . it was real. Then again we could of sold What a Hog knows about the Weather very good. And last but not least the Man and the Hog, which we could make a long story out of. Don't you think? Ha! Ha! . . . I hope you will come and see us when you can, and we will look over the natives and scenery for story material; you know they are plenty here, by just looking around a little. In the meantime I will be scouting around some for you."

Once he asked, Why not a story about the young people taking the bump after the good times that followed the War? Good times were all they had ever really known, they had just floated and eased themselves into good times, and then almost in one day they had to readjust everything to

the depression. "Wouldn't that make a story, though! Huh?"

In conversation, Jim puts a kick into the last word or two of the sentence, sharpening and intensifying his voice on them. Whether a person wants to or not, it is hard to disagree with him.

He knows the mistake of his life. It was not that he didn't get married, for he absolutely intended to, but that he postponed marriage until it is difficult if not impossible. He did this for a reason: "I thought I'd be smart. I seen young fellows getting married when they didn't have a hundred dollars, and I decided to get rich first. I seen the O'Gradys and the Conlins and the Gallaghers, all them rich old bachelors, and I thought I'd be rich like them first, and then marry. And now, God help us, I have neither family nor money! Wasn't I the fool!" He says the rich man without children and grandchildren is a poor man, and the man he envies now is the one with half a dozen boys and girls.

Well, it was the tall man himself that was in the kitchen as we rode up, his face pink, his thin hair slightly yellow, his teeth long and white. We asked if we hadn't come late. "Heavens! Lord, no—and me getting the supper! Any-way, when Ma was living we'd hardly ever have supper before seven or eight in summer."

His narrow body was like a string dropped from the upper sill to the doorstep. And the porch seemed meant as a joke; it was just one sheltered wooden step, and wouldn't shelter a pup or a bucket.

"Wait till I call Jim," Louis said. "He's around somewhere. Jim!"

"Yeah!" came up from the barn-side of the house. "I'll be up in just a jiffy. I seen him all right, ever since he came in sight by Hull's orchard."

Man, visitor, dog—all started off then to meet Jim, who came carrying a saggy old straw hat. His greeting was: "Say, I aint seen you in I don't know when. But I been following you like, the week or so you've been home."

We went first to look at two pairs of horses the boys were shaping up for the market, big grays and big bays, nearly a ton in every horse. "I just want to show you what they are,—you know, to what they were before the tractor came on the market." Soon we returned and went through the kitchen into the front room, and left Louis doubled up over the stove. "Yes," Jim said, "that's a good picture of Ma; just like her. . . . Yes, she was allful little, but a lively little thing; and do you know, she got littler, she actually did."

The conversation was mostly of local people and things; for example, of the weather; such a long dry spell; of nephews and nieces: ten of them in one family: "Your name and ours will be a mighty long time yet on the Ridge, the way it looks;" of the priest's sickness; "He'll be a lot different, now that he's gettin' better; if there's anything that makes you cross, it's a good pain in the belly or somewhere,—ah, I tell you;" of debts and of some one from Omaha who was trying to revise the mortgages downward; of last winter's market: "It was as good as any we'd had for four or five years, and at that none too good or steady, but you could make out on it. Fallon over here and I went in with a few steers; and Goldy Wren (that's not his name, but it's what they all call him), as soon as he seen it was us, comes right over and says, 'Where's your stuff? It's got preference, you know.' Goldy's smooth! But Fallon's stuff was prime. Goldy said what he could do, and we traded. Then do you know what he says? 'Everything's on Goldy! Goldy gets the dinners!' And he did; that's what he always does. He said, 'Go on in,' and we did. Then he came in himself and gave whisky and cigars to everybody that'd take them. And he wouldn't touch a thing himself, not Goldy; never does."

The third man and last member of this family came in from the little porch where he had been spoon-feeding the cats. He is not less lean but a little less tall, an exceedingly modest man, very quiet, his left shoulder drooped, his

nose turned a little, his eyes the gray-blue of an October sky.

Louis had things ready now at the supper table. But Jim stood for a moment in the front room and made gestures for the benefit of the other two, though they were not looking. "Do you know what he says?" he asked. "He says we've got a nice scenery here at this west window. And it's a sure thing we have; I've often noticed it. You ought to see it there just about dark, you know when the snow is on and the sun is setting. Say, that's something to see."

It is hard to make out which of these men is the best at telling stories. The third, the quiet one, uses the fewest words, but is good at putting in the right word and at asking questions; he keeps still and enjoys himself till the proper instant, and then prompts. Several neighbors have said they like him best, and it is certain that no one could dislike him.

"How about that time, Jim," he said, "when you went down to Prop Shepky's to the dance? Tell us about how you managed to dance with Prop's fat little girl."

"You fellows want to laugh at me," Jim said. He was as happy as could be. "And she wasn't little, now don't you ever forget that—a girl that fat, I'll say not! But she was short, I admit that. Well, the puzzle was, when I came to swing, how I would manage to get a hold of her, she was that short. A stump of a girl—Lord, like a two-year-old heifer!" We all had by heart Jim's answer to his question; he knew we knew it, but he repeated it once more: "I took her by the ears and swung her right around!"

Louis' best story of later events was about how he tried to navigate by himself on a streetcar in Chicago where he had gone to visit relatives and had for a day or two been escorted; then he tried going alone and found that he knew nothing about how to reach his destination; everybody else knew just when to get off and the car stopped just where each one wanted, but refused to stop in the middle of the block for Louis; when anyone else wanted off, the door

opened but when he tried it he found it locked. Everything seemed to be planned against him.

The quiet man has long had a local reputation for cats. "This summer, dry and all," Louis said, "and chickens and hogs suffering, and men—you might say—dying of thirst, and not enough feed for anything, he kept all the six or eight cats in slick shape."

"Well," the quiet man said, "how about the time you loaded up the bag of cats and dumped them there in town?"

The tall lean man postponed a bite and looked our way. "That's just what I didn't do," he said. "I kinda got excited and didn't know cats from kittens or the sack from the car door.

"Well, anyway, we were heavily overstocked, at least I thought so, and I sacked up kittens and toms and nannies, anything I could get, into a gunney sack, and went to town. I use' to dump them out up by the blacksmith shop, so's they could run in there to get warm if it turned cold. So I run up that hill in the old Ford—you know how rough it is when you turn there; and I was just reaching for the sack and had a hold on it when I saw a crowd of people looking at me from Shanley's across the road. Now you know there never was people on that lawn before, in the history of the world! So I dropped the cats—tied or loose I didn't know—back into the car and coasted down the hill to Guggin's store and thought I'd unload the butter and eggs I had along. And Lord of heaven! Who was there looking right at me but Mike Murphy, of all men! And I thought, 'He'll see them cats, and I'll never hear the last of it!' So I jumped into the car and stepped on 'er right down the hill, and went to turn east around the town-pump. But that turn is sharp and none too safe, going fast, on a good day, and this was my bad day. As I rounded the pump, I heard the back door slam open. Now I was in for it; I was sure the cats had gone out, down the hill, before everybody.

"I snook into an alley, and was I scared? But when I

took a look, there was my cats all tied up in the bag. Well, that's the last time I ever took a load of cats to town."

While Louis ate, he worked his whole body up to the table, but while he talked he worked his chair back inch by inch so that at last he sat on the edge of it, his sharp elbows on the oilcloth, his arms up for gestures, the sleeves short, the bib of the overalls swinging like a hammock. Only one thing mattered, the story; and he put that across. They say that when he was initiated into the K o' C's, he talked so well, so wholeheartedly and with such fun that he shamed the visiting speakers, men supposed to be of some distinction.

We said then we must go, our time was up. The third man had asked us the year before what "time" is, and he said now, "Wait a second. Don't you know, I'm still wondering what time it is. I sit here on a rainy day, and think of losing time and making it up. We pay by time and wear out in time. But what in the world is it?"

The answer was to repeat an old view. Time and change are close neighbors. Suppose you take a big rock working its way down the slope here in the Daley place now for a hundred years. Well, it has a front side toward the foot of the hill, and the back behind it; or we could call them before and after. "Before and after" are time terms, but they're first of all place terms. The rock does move down the slope, it makes a trail after it, and we could mark the line of its travel. Its going from here to here, or from here to here, exactly matches the turning of the earth once in the face of the sun; and we could call either of them a "day," the going of the rock or the turning of the earth; but it's much easier and handier to take the earth's turn as the unit of movement, because its turning is steadier than the movement of the rock. So we get "time" as the measure of change.

The three men who know how to feed cattle, to build up their land, to watch the corn sprout and the clover ripen, to keep track of the market, these men followed; maybe they got lost for a moment, then followed again. They

kept saying: "We know that too well! . . . Gosh, it seems like that's the way it would . . . Just a minute, how's that you say? . . . Oh, it would, of course, . . . Why, you just betchal!" The tone was sometimes of disbelief, though the speaker would not want it to be: "Oh, I guess that's true, all right. . . . Now, aint that funny!"

As one of the three took me home in an old car, we thought of themselves and the land. Fat men, we thought, would be no good on our hills, they would roll off them down the slopes, and faster than the rock goes down the Daley hills. Men have to fit their land and their sky. The Granger, for instance, did not have to get around on hill-sides, and probably could not have done it. Big Man scarcely lived on the land at all, he was so given to the love of people. But the other men we have reviewed, in one way or another, belong to the Ridge. The lean humanist lived for years and years on it. Mary Ann's people all farmed the hillsides. Muck and the stump man could have made out anywhere, if they were put to it. The man always of his time was also always on the hills.

Louis and Jim and the quiet man know how to skim the bit of fat off the ridges, and also off any little plains and valleys between the ridges. And they have to be spare men, thin and spare, to balance themselves as they straddle the arid ridges, for they are men looking down like trees or hawks into gullies, and looking up like tilted airplanes into the naked sun, thinking on farm problems, thinking on the age and the size of the world as well as on the problems of their own pig-pen and kitchen.

Life for Louis and Jim and the quiet man is a lot of things. It is managing a farm, feeding, buying and selling, borrowing and paying, it is cooking, it is thinking about time, it is praying and talking and dancing. On an autumn day I met Jim driving through town. "I got to go to Russell," he said, "for repairs for the corn-binder. Louis is making the First Fridays, and we're all going to make them, as fast as we can. Don't you think it's a good thing?"

Holding Up the Hills

Puts a fellow kinda on the safe side. But it looks like one of us al'ays has to stay home and feed."

At Christmas, one of them writes: "I received your letter and was sure glad to hear from you. I want to thank you for remembering my Mother by saying a Mass for her . . . he plays on the second team and is a darn good player too; they haven't been beat yet. I would like to send you the picture, but Jim has it hanging on the wall; you know Jim has got to be a very Devout fan, in fact we all are. . . . Well, old Jip passed away and the new Jip has taken full charge; whenever Jim loses his mits now all he has to do is look for the Pup. Well, we had a Bazar and made \$1400. Wasn't that good? And of course we had that Mission too, and say we had a wonderful talker, he sure gave us a lining up, we wasn't as good a Catholics as we thot. Well, I guess everyone is well around. Wishing you a Merry Christmas, I remain as ever your friend."

CHAPTER V

Wrestling with Plow and Sod

MEN come and men go, but earth lies there cool, capable, willing to be made to serve. Earth is good because man is good and tells it what to do. Earth has a human, personal quality borrowed from man, and it is rich because it manages to provide for him in at least a poor way.

When a person goes through any of our woods on a summer day he is sure to pick up a wood-tick or two; hence the name of the region is Tick Ridge. The main creek running through it is called Bee Branch. One spring day I went in and out along this creek, and for an hour and a half saw no one. The bed in most places was merely damp, and the wire fences that came down out of the brush and trees of the slopes were stretched up higher than a man's head where they crossed the Branch. In a couple of places, some one had cleared and burnt patches and plowed them a season or two before; likely it was some renter who scratched at the land in the summer and trapped skunk and possum in the winter, or likely enough it was one of Mary Ann's many boys. In one little field, crooked and abandoned, foxtail and horse-weed from last year lay dead and would burn like oil.

Hardly a thing was an obstacle to man's thoughts here, only a jay or a crow, or cows with young calves and cows heavy with calf; no clear human track fresh in this earth.

A yellow-clay road comes down from the Ridge to cross this creek on a bridge whose banisters are hung since last Hallowe'en with old corn-plows, and then the road twists up a hill to its former level. Near the bridge a great dome of a hill has been cleared as long as ourselves can remember, and at the foot of the hill, near a spring, of course, an old house and sheds and barn have crumbled.

Along the edge of the hill and up beside a fence that climbed straight over the hill, a plow had been run three or four times that very morning. It was rough work, because the foothill was a mixture of gumbo and muck and reddish sand, the side was yellow clay, and toward the top of most of our hills the soil is like brick. And here was the work-man, a lad that could not be seventeen, one of Mick's boys, doing for himself.

He had an old horse and a blue-roan colt that was hardly broken in, and unless the plowman knows and watches, a colt of this sort is likely to pull sideways, to favor one shoulder and to be ruined for the year. We say then that the horse is "sweneyed." He is twisted and out of shape, and not only won't pull but is not fit to pull his share.

That is just one thing a boy has to learn and to keep in mind. At the same time he has to know how to make the plow scour, to adjust the depth of the plowing at every moment as he goes uphill and again as he goes down, to have an eye for stubble and trash and rocks and possibly the remnants of stumps, and to make sure that the plowed land lies down in an even way. And meanwhile he has to be getting the work done—no time to pick violets, to take a look at the mulberry blossom, to buy new harness and tools, to go and get a trainer for boy or horse. It's up to him now, it's up to him to stand punishment, to stay in the furrow till he is thrown out, and then to get back into it. He'll learn, all he has to do is to pay the price.

The soil is curly, the hill itself is a stupid old cow of a thing. No matter; this is where the boy must get his first knocks.

The little boy is at the lever, and trying to tip things the right way. Everything must be put rightly together, soil, horse with horse, and the lines that manage the team, the tip of the plow that must not slice out of the ground or nose too deeply into it, the time of day, the lateness of the spring. The boy needs everything, all his little mind and his bit of information, his tiny knot of muscle. He is not totally prepared, he has in part to get ready as he goes,

and if he gives in at all, if he ever softens up for an instant in any way, the plowing does not get itself done as the eventual crop will demand. And the neighbors, too, as well as the boy's father, make certain demands, a fact well known to the boy.

Here, then, was the boy wrestling with team and earth and plow. His poor knuckles were chipped, his face and overalls covered with dust and sweat. And we may be sure that his shins were bruised.

A boy must learn to work and get the knack of making out for himself. Idling and playing, any young Mick will be good for nothing; he'll never command the art of how to do things. A boy is expected to take hold, even from the time he is ten or so, to see how things are done and to begin to do them. He had better begin to earn and to save, to pick up a few dollars or even a few cents, in one way or another; in summer, working for a dollar a day in the corn or wheat or alfalfa, in the winter trapping 'coons and skunks and civets.

In more normal times and when things cost less, the boy was soon able in that way to buy a colt, and possibly his father or grandfather would give him a heifer calf. He had reason to work now and to stay at home. If he was smart, he would begin to look to a full outfit of his own, a team, a set of old harness pieced together, an old plow that could by labor be got to scour, and at the end of that first summer of going on his own he would fix up a dubious sort of rig, break a horse to drive single, and then he would be all set to go with the girls. And after two or three years he'd certainly think of renting a whole place for himself, a place possessed of some kind of shelter called a house. He would be ready then to marry and settle down.

It is not merely land but people also that have to be made. When the boy at first tries riding, he is no more a part of the combination, man-on-horseback, than is the hand a part of the wall; he is just held on there, and the horse is whoa'd and guided by the father. Then some day with no one looking, the boy climbs by way of the belly-

band and back-strap to the back of an old horse, and he trembles if the horse reaches for a mouthful of weeds or turns his head to chase away a fly.

He gets past the stage of merely holding the lines as his father drives, he even trots the team some fine day. Harnessing a horse is for him a gigantic labor. A work horse is tall, and he doesn't kneel down to help the boy with bridle or breeching. We recall well how happy we were when we were able to get the collar buckled and the hames over the collar of an old horse for a boy older than ourselves and much stronger but not tall enough. He and his sister came from the place Muck and Letty were to occupy on their arrival, a strong boy and a tall girl leading the horse and actually dragging the harness behind them; what they wanted was help to put horse and harness together. In those first laborious efforts, a boy nicks his hands, he gets horse hair into his mouth, and it may be that the stolid horse is blamed for the boy's insufficiency.

What no little boy likes is little-boy jobs. Endless errands, commanded: run and get the hammer and nails, go and get the cows, bring in the wood now, help your mother there, can't you pump a tin of water for the goslings? The hard thing is not in being a little boy, but in being taken for one.

It is not so hard until the boy begins to notice how he is rated. Then he is likely to go through several years when he is willing to be thought big, and when nevertheless no one else ever thinks of him as anything but little. Of course he is put to work leading the stacker-horse. He would sooner rake or mow the hay, or try to plow corn. Girls could lead the stacker-horse, men never do; so it is as clear as day that everyone still thinks the boy a little boy.

He is given work and some of it is hard work, but everyone understands that it is not man's work. He is put on the down-row in husking. Everybody knows and accepts the saying, "Little boy for the down-row." Now it happens that this, the row tramped down by the team and straddled by the wagon the first trip across the field, is much the hardest

row. The dad and big brothers go along upright beside the wagon in a clean and decent way; their business is to husk standing corn. The poor little boy comes along behind, he has to trail, he has to be out of the range of any talk that goes on, and little as he is he has to stoop over all the time; there the wretched little fellow, going almost on his hands and knees, picks up out of the dirt and maybe out of snow and mud the corn flattened out by the team and wagon. He is the mop of the field.

That is the unimportant life of the little boy. But he will outgrow such a condition. Life has peculiar hardships for just these few years, and then some morning he finds himself circling a hill, the plow, the team, the golden crop that is to be, even the earth itself, in his hands, at least one of the horses his own, a few acres of a kind of waste land rented on shares. He knows now that life begins at seventeen, it begins with land-making and crop-making, the day when, with the help of a team and a patched-up outfit, he first turns a furrow in his own name.

People are not made wise in one day. A man is not at his ease the first time he takes a chew or smokes a pipe, nor the girl the first time she bakes a loaf of bread. But when I came, the one time in my life, to see Matt Quirk and the old lady, these people were long contentedly settled into their world.

They lived in a section of their own, a few miles from Tick Ridge. To get to them, a person had to go across the valley called Jack Oak, across the cleared thin upland called Skinner's Ridge; then he came to Whippoorwill, and if he went a mile farther he was into the woods again, in the area called Seldom Seen, and that is where J. J. lived.

The Quirk's place was, so far as we ever knew it, one nob or knoll of Whippoorwill. It was a poor place, wooded on the side toward the road, and said to be roughly cleared back of the house where in an earlier day they had raised a handful of wheat, a pipeful or two of longgreen and a few nubbins of corn.

They might have been there forty, fifty or sixty years;

in fact, he may have been born on that hill. In our time they never went a foot from it, never went out to help thresh, never were spry enough to walk the four miles to Mass. And not many ever went to them, certainly in their whole lifetime not forty different persons, and often no one at all for two weeks at a time. Quirk and the woman were not fighting with rocks and stumps and blight any more, they had given up our restless digging at the earth. They had turned up their soles now to the kitchen stove, and were settled down for good.

I went just once to see them, sent (to be exact) by our mother, and the mode of conveyance was the sorrel mare bought from Mary Ann's seventh son. For our mother could never stand to see people left totally in a back woods, seemingly neglected, unable to visit with the neighbors. In the summer, she would dress up any poor neighbor girl, Hoosier or Catholic, and take her to Mass, and once or twice a year she would visit the most woebegone families. So when she heard that the old man of this house was sick, some one had to go.

Well, the mare crawled along through the woods and in a minute or two toward a dim light. Inside the house, it was as contented and warm and settled as if this was the calm beginning of things or an old world where ages ago everything had eased itself into its place and made up its mind to be once for all at home.

The old woman let me in, a stick in her hand to shake at the fat lazy dog that also had got up to welcome me. The chair she offered me was a kind of stool made at home, square in the seat, three-legged, the back not tall enough to be of any use. The woman was a big person, stooped from the hips, the arms short and thick and kept partly curled up, the face hollowed out like warped board. Her long dress was a calico that must have once been blue, the tiny white dot nearly gone out of it, and her apron of white and brown stripes was washed to something now like one rusty color. The apron-string was drawn tightly, and above

it the dress filled out again as firm and full as a life-preserver.

She sat down in an old rocker that was like a boy's hand-made coaster and was so low that it left her only six inches from the floor. Life was here, in this house, near this stove, often in this rocker. But she would go a little way outside. She said, "O-ho! You were off the track, I guess. It's north more, it sways on the slope. . . . We do, that's true, we do be alone a good deal." As we asked or answered, her head of thin hair and most of her strong body nodded back and forth as if every bit of her understood.

People cannot imagine how quiet a house like that, off the road and in the woods, can be.

The old man was sick, he was down, and he had not yet seen me. She told him now that a boy had come to see him; she said he was not a very sick man, and would probably be around again in a week or two. At that he said, "Huh?" But she did not answer.

He was buried in a bed there in the kitchen, shoved up close to a rain-gray stove, a tiny plaything of a cook-stove from which she kept taking the lid with a blackened table-fork so that she could feed more hickory or oak into the body of live coals. It was as if she thought him frozen and hibernating and looked for him to come back fully to himself when he had been kept at sun-heat long enough. She had brought the wooden bed with slats and ticks out from the other room into the kitchen where she could see to it and to him and the dog and stove. There he was, stacked up in the bed, rolled into a short little pile. It is fairly sure that his location and posture were no doing of his; he had been put there, and put in that way.

He had a thin, shaggy little face and metallic, dead little hands; and the narrow legs were crooked up under the covers. Anyone could see he was a small man, but in that kitchen, already packed full with the table and stove, he and his trundle-bed were like a mountain and a plain.

The kitchen of the house was log, with a room of planed lumber built on at the end. The walls and the ceiling

which my head nearly touched were wainscoted, and had never been painted. A browned holy picture that couldn't be made out, a calendar of crinkled paper, and a small frameless looking-glass in a harness of twines hung on the wall; just these and nothing else. The floor was wood, a soft wood of boards probably eight inches wide; toward the door and the stove it was worn thin with use; the knots and the slick iron nails stood up like little pimples on it, and from corner to corner it was all scoured off fit for an altar.

To this day I cannot think that those old people were strange or peculiar. They had lived a human and balanced life and were rounding it out now at the milder end. They were the unambitious sort of Irish that set out in the first place merely to live, to look from day to day or at most from year to year; they had never got it into their heads that they were to be rich and soon to own half the county. Whom were they at war with? No one at all. The truth is, they were neighborly though they could not go to the neighbors and the neighbors did not come much to see them. Shut off alive there in the brush, they could do little good to any one, but it is sure they wished evil to no one under the sun. This was their world where they were company to each other. If one was sick, the other nursed; if one got out of sorts, the other smoked a calm and hopeful pipe, content to wait for sunnier weather.

It is easy to say that some of their four or five children should have stayed at home or taken the old folks away with them. Some such plan may have been made, but as it was, no plan was followed; things just came out that way. They had only one son, said to be a big, soft fat man, and if he had taken at all to land he might have cleared off their one poor forty and fenced it, and made the place like any other. But he was not born to farm. He went from job to job, and was slow to settle down; people claimed that he was affected by what we know as Larry in the back. And everyone knew what the old man said of him when the assessor had remarked, "He's been a carpenter, and a

teacher, and a cooper, and a water-boy when they were double-tracking, and a farmer." That's as far as he got, for the old man said, "Oh, no, by gad! He's no farmer. He was no good here."

The old woman said they didn't want any daughter to come home. "They have their own life, now." In a moment she added, "and we have our own roof."

To a stranger the old people might look bereft and as good as interred. To themselves they were not that way. They had a little world that was their own, they fit into it snugly, and they controlled it. They knew the ground their feet would touch when they got up in the morning, and the shift of wind that would end a rainy spell. Here they were at one with things and equal to themselves, they were out of other people's way, and other people were out of their way. This was their little fort, they held it quietly, and if they had minor differences they settled them at home and never troubled the neighbors about them.

Of a sudden the old woman rocked far back on her tiny chair and with its forward tilt bounced to her feet. "What you could do," she said, looking straight at me, "is drink a cup of tea. . . . But you won't go from here tonight; there's a storm gathering in the east, by the uneasy way he's snoring."

III
PIGS AND MOLASSES

CHAPTER I

Three Barrels of It Trickling Down

IN AN early day, everybody made and had to make molasses. It was not a thing to sell, and the main things were not to sell, but to eat. Making molasses is one of the processes that everybody we have mentioned had by heart. The process is so old and common with us that no one has a record of when we learnt it; of course, we got our start in this line from earlier Yankees.

The lean humanist made molasses, of course; he had to, for the eleven children. The Granger's people for a long time and right through their heyday made each year a barrel of molasses; in this matter as in everything else, anything was better than the buying. Mary Ann's people always made and still make molasses; I know the slope where their mill stands. The same is true of John Nolan, the man always of his time. The stump man's people and Muck and Letty loved to help each other make molasses; the work was a communal act, an act of devotion to each other. All these people knew how and had to know how to make molasses. The well-off did it as part of their thrift, the poor did it to survive.

Molasses went on the bread of the children all winter long, not just in January but from late September till out into the spring. It was sweets for them, it was sugar for everyone, and the scientists know now that of all foods molasses has the highest iron content.

And people still make molasses, the wiser and less commercial ones, and also those with big families; and certain old people have remained devoted to it.

As a matter of fact, people once made almost all their own things, and got along well, too; making things was an act of necessary economy and also a creative act. People

were making land to make food, and making food to provide for people, and generally it was not the growth and welfare of some foreign people we were laboring for, but the growth of our own families and neighbors. It was only later that the notion became common that life is big business, that one labors for money; and then, even on the farm, people began to think that they could not afford to make things, to make molasses, to bake bread, to milk a cow, to raise a few potatoes: everything would be bought, ready-made, sacked up or canned. The hard times will probably get many people to reconsider this notion.

The people for making molasses are a man and a woman and the three or four bigger boys and girls. The process is begun in the spring, during the corn planting; that is, if we may say that any such farm process ever really begins or ceases. With the warm sun beginning to come down, a patch of ground is picked, usually an odd and three-cornered piece where the corn rows run out short and are a nuisance to the man on the planter.

The man says: "I think it will be that patch there toward the far ditch; you know, where the slough cuts in on the field and that west hill runs down into a kind of trigger of land."

"I know, all right," the woman says. "That's strong ground, if it's just big enough. We always want to be good and sure about that."

Everybody knows where we are in the season, what we look forward to, what is being done in each part of each field. Each one knows about last year's seed, last year's soil preparation, last year's rains. But knowing and doing are mainly in view of this year's crop.

The growing of cane is simple and requires the knowledge of only a few points. The seed is soaked for a couple of hours to get it to sprout and come quickly through the ground. Then at the end of May, when all the corn is planted and the earliest of it is beginning to break the soil, the cane goes in: planted by hand, in rows made by the runners of an old sled dragged through the dust.

No crop is slower to make a start. Cane seems to lie idle and dead in the best land. Late in June, with the corn stretching up now toward a man's knee and being crossed or "run" for the second time, the cane barely promises to show through the ground. It is a tiny colorless thing, just a faint gosling green, and only a trained eye can tell it from the young foxtail. It has the unhealthiest look, and is so slight and colorless that people are slow to say whether the stand is too thick or too thin.

But no one cares. At this time of the season, cane can look after itself; it never fails to grow—no need to make tests as we do for seed corn. Ten to one, the stand will have to be thinned and the boys will have to do the job.

At last, the cane gathers life and vigor. In August, during the very dry hot spell when the corn is suffocated, when it wilts under the punishment it gets from southwest winds, its lowest leaves almost rattling, the cane goes to work, it leaps up, and once it has made its mark across the field it is not stopped by a little drought. It is a good dry-weather crop. Its tassel pushes up, a sickly color like the stalk and leaves; then it darkens, and toward September it is glossy like linseed. The cane is ready to be taken in now and made into molasses. But first it must be stripped and topped where it stands.

Man or woman says: "Looks to me like that cane would be as well off where it is for another week, or maybe ten days. Now is when it grows."

Maybe it had just as well stand. But people have to keep both eyes open. From now on the cane demands attention, devotion and care. For everyone knows from experience how sappy the molasses is when it is made from green cane, and ought also to know that if cane gets hit hard by frost it sours and the molasses then is not fit for man or beast.

Like it or not, the bigger boys and girls are into the cane on their way from school. They have started to strip cane. They make a mark, a dent, no more than a good

beginning; they set out in a gingerly way on the short rows near the creek and go a rod or two apiece.

On Saturday, everyone is into the cane, and there is no afternoon off and no hour off; the day is all straight day. Even so, the boys fool after a while with trick ways of getting the cane stripped; they try to stroke the leaves off with laths or staves. The device is little good, and cannot be used at all on down-stalks or on the lowest leaves of standing stalks. A boy might as well take his medicine, he might just as well go to work. So he runs up and down the stalk with his hand, grabbing stalk after stalk and leaf after leaf, humping the stalk over to get the leaves at the top, squatting on his heels to get those near the ground. He takes off every leaf; that's what it is to "strip" cane.

"Hey! He's not doing the down-stalks!" boy shouts of boy. "Make him come back here and do them; they're leaning over into his row."

By night, a dozen of the long rows are done. But twice as many remain to be done; the boys know; they have had them counted for at least a month.

At last the cane is stripped; it stands there like limber sticks in the wind, its body water-green, the tops brown and flaxen. It is done, but backs are sore, and most of all the shoulders and necks ache from reaching and looking up; and hands have been slit between the fingers by the sharp blades of leaves. No time now to be doctoring the wounds. There is work to do.

Anyone likes to top the cane, it goes so fast and is such a relief after the slow dull labor of stripping. A tall boy takes two rows up the field and two down. He gathers four or five stalks into one hand and with a stroke of the corn-knife in the other he chops off the heads, some of which will be put away for seed, in a dry place and out of the reach of mice and sparrows. Then the naked and headless stalks are cut off at the ground and hauled to the mill. The boy must watch that the blade of the knife and the cut end of the stalk are always kept out of the dirt.

The boys have had an advance taste of the product.

For three or four weeks they have got a kind of sugar-water by sucking the juice from the stalk. "Pretty good already; here, try a joint."

"Ya, soon be fit for molasses."

The boy breaks the stalk just at the joint; it won't break anywhere else, but holds on like a bramble of hedge or hickory. He peels the joint, which means that he tears off the rind, from joint to joint, in long strings or limber slabs; then he chews the pulp. Or he sucks the juice directly from the stalk, careful not to let lips or tongue get caught in the cracked rind. It is pleasant to take the juice in that way, a sip at a time; to run the finger tip through the whitish powder, white dotted with purple and rust, inside the base of the leaf, and not be worried about the chinch bugs, inactive most years but always hidden at the butt of every leaf; and it is pleasant not to wonder at all but just to be dully aware of the slight, straight up-and-down fluting that runs the length of every joint, but changes with the leaves from side to side.

That was fun, of course. But today the boys are busy, they are grinding out the juice: three barrels of it, nearly three hours to the barrel, trickling down from the mill, and squirts of it repeatedly flying into the boy's face as he feeds stalks into the mill. By night the sticky suit of overalls and jacket can be left almost standing by itself.

Grinding cane is labor. We must keep the horse going on the lead-pole, we must keep three or four or five stalks pouring straight through the slots into the mill, we must keep bits of leaf and pulp from damming up the gunney-sack through which the sap is strained into the barrel, we must keep an eye on the barrel that it doesn't overflow, we must keep the stack of pommeys mowed away where it wriggles out at the back of the mill. That is a full-time job for any boy. And usually a boy has to do it alone. For the other boys are yet topping cane, or picking it up in little armfuls and loading it into the wagon to haul it to the mill; and the parents are cooking molasses. We may be sure that Louis and Jim and their brother did this kind of

boy-work in their day, and so did the stump man and the others.

And the day's work is not yet done. Toward the heel of the evening, the boy, never minding that he has been busy and has grown a bit tired, will help older people to milk cows and feed pigs and to lift the day's second batch of cooked molasses from the fire.

The pommey or sapless ground-up stalk is good for nothing, unless for banking pig-sheds or filling ditches. Cows like it, but it would almost at once turn them dry. "There is no sap in it."

Two batches of molasses are cooked in a day. The furnace is a trough dug into the earth on the side of a hill, and lies open at the lower end where the fire is fed. Wood for the fire, so we always thought at home, ought to be clean and almost precious. For many seasons, we burned whiteoak rails that had been bleached in the sun for twenty or thirty years, some of them the originals that our father, when he bought the place, cut and split in a neighbor's timber to fence in the pigs.

What we had at home was a cooperative mill. Our father and a close neighbor, named Long John,¹ bought it longer ago than we can remember. It was first at the neighbor's for three years, and then at our place for three, and there it remained, for the reason that this neighbor liked to come and work with others, to puff away at his pipe and to talk as he worked. The best chance in the world for this is in making molasses. And our father liked to feed the fire or skim the boiler, and to talk. In this they were well met, and were glad to have a mill in partnership. A small mill such as ours would do for three or four neighbors, but in that case two boilers would be required, and the mill would sometimes have to grind through the night. People were willing to work early and late, but not all

¹ Such names as Murphy and O'Brien were so common that we had to say: Long John, Little Johnny, J. C., and Yellow Hammer; also Big Jim, Little Jim, Broken Nose, Red Jimmy, and Sorrel; we children ran these groups of names into singsong verse.

night; and they were mostly for neighborliness and not for any big centralization or mass production.

We made our own boiler, as our father was good at using tools. The bottom and rounded ends were of sheet iron, the long sides of yellow pine; it had no cover, but we shedded it over, to protect the fire and sap, if a rainy spell set in. The handles of the boiler were four horse-shoes, one side of each nailed to the wood, the other side left in the air so that two hickory poles, brought fresh from the woods each fall, could be run into the open "heels" of the shoes to lift the cooked molasses from the furnace.

When only sixteen I tried to tend the cooking, but kept the fire blazing too long at the finish and my molasses came off with a faintly burnt taste; it had to be put into a keg by itself where it stayed till spring when the good molasses was all gone; and it was more than one season before the guilty cook heard the last of that story.

Here is the procedure—and it could be written by the stump man, or Louis, or Muck. Ninety gallons of sap is poured through a flour-sack into the boiler at sunrise, and in two hours or so, if the fire is pushed, it begins to simmer, and soon then it is boiling up. An ugly skum, like pond-water in August, keeps coming to the surface and has to be skimmed off; the green sap itself, which was sweet when sucked from the stalk, is in bulk now and is sickening in look and taste. Toward noon, a little more than ten gallons of the liquid remains, and is thickening fast. As it boils now in the bottom of the pan, every color runs through it. The scummy green is lost and in its place are tan and gold and tawny, umber and oak, weaving into each other. It comes up chestnut at the center where the fire is hottest, and bubbles and foams away into russet and cream at the edges and ends of the pan.

Just to have this lovely thing there before people, a thing made, under God, by their own hands—this would be something. But they often see its loveliness and speak of it as they work.

The molasses is almost cooked now, and both man and woman stand by, and a boy is called from the mill to help. "Watch it close, now! It's nearly done."

"Look at this I took up not half a minute ago in the saucer, will you? See, it sticks as it drips from the spoon. I think it's about right, don't you?"

"Here's the poles, ready. Now don't slip there."

It is off the fire and is taken up with a dipper and poured scalding hot through a funnel into a barrel. "My!" says man or woman. "Did you ever see it nicer?"

"Lovely. Room for a couple more batches in this barrel, don't you think?"

The children lick the boiler, not at noon, for the second batch must go at once then into it, but at night. They scrape up the bit of molasses left on the bottom, now between hot and cool, using spoons or wooden paddles or little scoops made from the rind of the cane.

The week or ten days is hard, and the day, eating into the night at both ends, is very long. But there is time to plan, to see where everything is—every row of standing cane, every load of stalks, every bucket of sap, every cloud, every keg or barrel, every half-hour. And there is time to talk about the quality of every batch; the product is never quite right, not altogether perfect. "Just a shade thick," says man or woman. "That we took off at noon was thin, if anything, but a nicer color, lighter and yellower. This is soon going to be dark, I think, like old molasses."

"The best we made yet this year was the day before yesterday noon; clear, and the color of worked taffy."

"Hard to beat that; maybe though, didn't you think, just the least suggestion of burn in it."

CHAPTER II

Hoosier Family Without a Cow!

IN THE days before the War, the few people who were well heeled were into beef cattle. They fed, as the saying was; probably they fed throughout the year; they bought lob after lob of land, and then kept and fed more cattle, usually steers that had been grassed for two or three years. Hogs of course ran after the cattle in the lots, as is always the custom. The horse was a kind of king, too, especially if he could be finished to perfection.

Poor people sold their little calves when they were a few months old, for ten dollars or less a head; something had to pay the rent or the interest and taxes and look toward paying the bill at the store. Sometimes the poor people had a horse to sell, and that was a big month or half-year for them; but they had as often to buy, and were a whole year then in squaring matters.

What the poor could do to protect themselves, was to put dibs and dabs together; in that way they could survive, though they were never on the pig's back. They had produce, and with the aid of it could keep even at the store all summer long.

In our part of Iowa the farmer who was a real farmer at all, always had three or four cows, and he sometimes had ten or twelve. We were not dairy farmers, but mere farmers; all the same, it was odd when some family had no cow to its name; through lack of push or of luck, the family was already on the way down, or it was a trapper family, "bred-out Hoosiers," that drifted in one winter and would drift out the next. "No cow" was the ordinary proof of incompetence.

Cows are known for stupidity. They stand, they lie down, they eat but without the evident relish of the pig

or the dog at his food; they breed, and bear bull calves or heifer calves, they are milked much as if they were machines, they grow old and are shipped as cannery.

The cows are milked in sheds in winter or alongside strawstacks or fodder racks near the sheds, and in summer in the open. That is the case where a family has only five or ten cows. On summer evenings, when the day is nearly gone, the west promising sun or rain or drought for tomorrow, the cows are waiting their turns to be milked, some of them lying down working away at their cuds. A boy likes then to offer the sole of his bare foot to be licked. An old cow has a long red rasp of a tongue. The old heifer, her hard ribs eased a bit into the dog-fennel or into the cakes of dried manure there on the ground, takes a sucking lick at the boy's callous foot, and the boy bounces away tickled and giggling. He comes back by inches as if daring her, and cow and boy repeat the process, both of them well pleased.

That is the way in the cowlot of every farm. Older brothers or father and mother are stripping the cows; on a farm or two, the girls do all the milking, either because help is scarce or because the boss refuses to spare any of it. The milk goes at first like thin broken little streams of metal into the pail, then like full squirts of water into water, and in a couple of minutes, if the particular cow is "easy," it comes in white sudsy foam up along the sides to the brim.

A cow is stolid and content, her eye is big and dull, expressive of nothing, as if her inner world, supposing she has one at all, were a blank. Even a well-bred cow, a fancy one, is never fine grained or delicate.

Yet the cow has her own ways and habits which must be respected. Sometimes she gets worried and fretty: her calf has just been taken from her and is going to be fed by hand; that is, a boy crowds the calf's stiff neck down so as to get the calf's nose, which wants to stick up as if at the mother's bag, into a crock of her fresh milk; he pushes the forefinger into the soft young mouth as a decoy for

the teat, and after the calf starves and bellows for a day or two he will eagerly dry up the last drop in the crock; after all, a calf is not a permanent and every-sided fool. But the cow does not like to be robbed of her calf. So she becomes obstinate and won't let her milk down, or as they also say, "she won't give down." And there is no way for man to make terms with her; he simply has to wait, a minute or two or a day or two.

Cows rate as hard or easy to milk. Mooley and Flathead had teats like velvet, and if these cows "stood," a boy could milk either of them in three minutes; two gallons in that time. But Old Bolly and each of her heifers after her were tough and had an udder of iron and only little steel stubs of teats. The milkman would grip and grip at them till his arm below the elbow ached, and then pull and strip with finger and thumb till his hand cramped.

A bad time for milking is when an icy wind cuts at the moistened fingers. But it is worse when it is hot, and that would be after six or so on a summer morning; then the cows won't stand, the flies are a perpetual pest to them, and man and beast torture each other. It is better to milk in summer before the sun is an hour in the sky, and again an hour after sunset.

If a cow is quiet and well broken, the milkman may half-sit on a low stool, a one-legged stool, just a block of oak or hickory with a piece of board nailed across the top. He sits on the right side (hardly anyone breaks the cows right and left), and makes her hist; that is, bring her right foot back nearly a step so that he can get at her udder.

Some of the young heifers are as mean as mules. One does not sit while he milks them. He has help, he gets the heifer into a corner or against a wall, at most he kneels on one knee, he braces himself with the other foot, bunts his head into her flank, holds the pail in one hand and milks with the other. At every instant, he has to be ready. She might leave him or bowl him over. He has to know, from the stir in her flank and teat, the very beginning of a leap or a kick, and he must be as quick to move as she is.

Once I saw the lean humanist holding a cow with a rope and a club while a daughter milked. The girl said, "Don't hit her, Pap." The man's voice, always so serious and deep and slow, meant business as he said, "I'll hit her if she needs it!"

An old cow is quite different. They always said that the stump man's grandmother used to sit flat on the ground of a summer evening to milk old cows; she pushed her feet through underneath the cow. But they tell great stories about that woman who was said to be calm and capable. One summer when I led the stacker-horse for Chuffy O'Hare—the first time I ever was paid money—he told us that he once saw her at nine in the morning coming up a hill out of the Mulhall woods carrying three buckets of wild blackberries, one in each hand and one on her head. It was not this woman, however, but a neighbor of hers, and Irish born too, who used to drink up the foamy leavings of milk when the calf had drained the crock. "Sure," she said, "aint that as good as any part of it?"

Most people have now long used a machine to "separate." But till 1910 or so the milk was brought to cellar or cave to be strained. The crocks had been scalded and were waiting cool, last night's milk having been emptied out of them only an hour or two before. The milk stood till the cream rose and was taken off with a skimmer or with a saucer; then the cream was poured through a flour-sack to make sure it was clean.

Some of the skim-milk went to the hand-fed calves, some as drink to the chickens, some of it remained standing until it turned to clabber and was then given to the chickens, and always what was left over was thrown in with the swill and fed to the pigs.

A tall, stooped man used to come along, a man with a pack of wolf hounds, and ask for buttermilk. To the children he was as near a legend as a living person can be; he carried his possessions in a sack, and was not really a hunter or a woodsman but a man who loved to be with people.

The children would say, "What's that the hounds are after now, Patsy—aint that a wolf?"

"Na, boy," he'd say. "I do fear it's a cottontail." It was only when he spoke to us that we ever heard a rabbit turned into a cottontail. "Has your mother any bit of buttermilk left, do you think? Oh, here's yourself, Maam; have you any buttermilk I could just taste?"

"Not a drop, Patsy; we poured it all out half an hour ago to the pigs. But there is clabber there on the cellar steps."

We watched then while Patsy Logue stood his gun against the wall and took from his shoulder the gunney-sack that he called his suitcase, and seated himself on his heels to eat and drink clabber out of the crock. He left nothing but the whey. "Tell your mother thanks. No wonder you think the dogs are trailing something the way they roar down that draw in Big Man's timber forty."

People don't churn now, except for their own use; they ship cream. The old custom was to churn, and this was done by hand. The dash-churn is best, but a barrel is thought to be good. Even a covered pail will do to churn in the winter when there is only a little cream every week or two; some one sits in the kitchen and shakes the pail up and down or back and forth. But in summer the dash goes up and down every day, and some days it is necessary to do two churningings.

Off and on for several years our father was at work inventing a churn; he could give only pieces of wet days to it, and the special materials he had were only a couple of chunks of iron, crooked things that the old blacksmith Dooley, a big empty box of a man,¹ hammered into the required shape; besides that he had a barrel or keg and some bits of wood. The irons were so formed that this new type of churn was to have the advantage of double action, the paddles hitting the cream on their way up and their way down, with the idea that it would make butter in a short

¹ One week a penitent saint and the next violent with drink. Once as a child I asked him if he could do a bit of welding, and he roared, "I could, man! but will I?"

time. Perhaps with a little more perfecting, it would; it actually produced butter, but for some reason the inventor gave up the project, and the crooked irons lay around the smoke-house for twenty years.

"We must get at the churning and get it out of the way early," says the mother at five-thirty or so. "It's going to be hot today."

Before breakfast, a boy is set to the task. The dash patters up and down for ten minutes. Then the boy tires of the business, he leans over, he tries half-resting himself on the side of the barrel, or he oozes his toes into the damp soil where he is located under a maple or elm.

"Keep that churn going steady, therel!" he hears from the kitchen. "Keep up a steady stroke; you're splashing it!"

The boy does his best, though he hates woman's work. Soon he is asked, "Is it breaking yet?"

"It shows signs, just beginning."

The question means, "Is it giving in?" And the answer means that it is. The boy finds out by stopping his stroke with the dash up; faint bits of butter have begun to appear in the cream that runs back down the dash into the churn. He works with a better will now, for he is told and he knows that it won't be long till it's done. "Keep at it. Be sure of the even stroke; it will be done in no time."

In a few minutes, just two or three more, it is well broken; tiny blobs of butter, between gold and cream, ride up and down the dash. The stroke is eased off, it becomes a kind of coaxing, lazy little slap. "Is it gathering? Be careful, now."

The butter is scattered in lumps on top of the cream and everywhere through the cream, and it must be got to gather (the word is pronounced "gether"). It may be that the cream was not quite sour enough. Perhaps warm water is needed if the day is chilly, or cold water if it is hot; it is so hard—when people can't afford a thermometer—to have things just right. Well, the butter is gathered, and the boy is glad to get away, glad he is not allowed to take up the butter. Up it comes then out of the churn with the help

of a wooden ladle and a wooden bowl to put it in. A couple of handfuls of salt are thrown into the bowl and worked with the ladle into the new butter, though one old woman always insisted on working the butter with her hands.

Just as the men are sitting down to table at noon, someone comes bringing some of the fresh butter out of the cave. It is soft gold, specks of it are shining, it sinks into the bread. "Does any of ye want any buttermilk? It's fresh there and foamy, there in that black jar."

Someone says, "Awful nice new butter," working it with his knife and sampling it. The quality is tested and approved by everyone.

"Never saw it churn better; weather just right, not too warm and not at all chilly. I think we'll have five or six pounds of it left over this week to help with the groceries. And I was just thinking, couldn't we take a bite of it over to the John Roberts', just enough for one meal? Good neighbors, if you do have to say they're poor at managing."

One day a week, at least in summer, the women go trading; that is what they did when they went in springwagons, and it was usually on Saturday. They met in the store and visited, each knowing how much butter the other brought, and what things she got with it. Mary Ann Cawley told us only a couple of years ago that it used to be one of her happiest days when she met neighbor women at the store; "and they'd be managing," she said; "trying to see what they could do without and what little thing they could bring home to the children."

CHAPTER III

So Obliging as to Lift the Mortgage

MAN has been the partner of the pig for a long time, has lived by him and almost for him. What is a farm or a farmer without a pig? The Lord knows they'd be badly off. That is the practical side of the story. And the pig is a kind of sacred animal. Looking on a few years ago at the slaughter of the four million, farmers said: "It is not right; the packers will pay for this." And we overhear good men now dating events from that strange season. A man says, "That was the year they killed the little pigs." Oh, to be sure! We won't forget that year. Pigs are such noble brutes.

Little squealing droves of them run after the sows in the April sun. Each piglet is a short and tiny fellow; he is smooth, but so short and so altogether tiny that a townsman would never guess he is to amount to something. He is all red, all black or white, or spotted and crossed, or he wears a white banner over black shoulders.

Fault can be found with him. He has a dull ear—not a silk purse gracing his temple, but plain pig's ear, a miniature sow's ear; an ear so dull that he is slow to catch the difference between the thump of green corn bounced into the dust from the swish of skim milk going into the trough. His eye, stuck almost in the side of his head, is not sharp and is fastened none too wisely on the path just an inch or two ahead of him, the ear flapping over it like a blind or dimmer. His voice is horrid, it is born ugly, and is either a fat contented grunt or a thin whine like a freezing wind.

Worst of all, the pig has a reputation. He is dirty and greedy. He does not object to dust, and he actually likes to lie in the mud and to drink slop. It is true that he won't eat lemons or tin cans, but he has a swilly, slushy way as he

takes his food. Tsup, tsup, tsup, his piggy jaws go. He hurries, as if he were about to be robbed, and he eats as if he never in his life had enough.

And yet there is something to be said for the pig. In our neighborhood at least, he has always had his titles to respect. None of us ever kept the pig in the parlor, but our poor people and all our people have lived by the pig. Big Man fattened thirty or forty shoats a year; he fed them out, as we say; they went to market lily white and round and sleek. The Granger's people always had green fields of pigs and dry lots of hogs, long weighty hogs, red and black. And it was the pig that kept the heads of the stump man and Muck and Mary Ann's family above water.

One old woman—just a legend to me—remains in my mind only through the story of hard luck with pigs. She went to a crony and said, as she had often said, that her husband was the stingiest man in the world. The crony knew there was some new complaint, and asked what it was. "Well, he is," said old Mrs. Biddy. "He is worse now than ever. Do you know what he did, sold off all but the one sow, and what did the sow do but sit down on the hill the other day and have one pig!"

That was tragedy, especially in an earlier day when people so fully lived by the pig. Always in Iowa we have to have chickens, and two or three or a dozen cows, we have to have our own corn and molasses and a few asides such as wheat and pumpkins and sheep. But the pig is the main thing. A toothless man has lately told me that among the settlers one big family, with triplets and two pairs of twins, hung up late in the winter the white bodies of thirteen butchered shoats. That family would manage to live.

The pig was said to be, and he was, the gentleman that lifted the mortgage. As some farmers yet say: "If the pig don't get you out, you won't get out."

The pig is important. And notice how wise he is. Pigs live in houses; men quite gladly build houses for them. But a hog-house has to be very well built if an old sow is to stay in it to bear her eight or ten pigs. She and not the

farmer decides the question. When she comes to term, she will root her way through anything short of a wall of iron, and get out into the open and build a house of her own. A sow is not fussy, but she is particular and she likes to have something personal about the house in which her own little ones are to be born. She says yes and no in the most determined fashion. She rams down a door and heads for the strawstack and nests alongside it, or she grabs up mouthfuls of straw and weeds, and builds where she pleases; she will nose into the soil and throw up an earth-work which she lines with hay and awkward chunks of sod. This is not a good house; it is not storm proof, but a kind of well in which the pigs easily drown or are smothered in an excess of straw.

We may call it a fool's house, but it is the sow's own work and not man's. A Jersey or an old mare has not this sense for building.

That is not all a pig knows. He keeps his eye on the future, too. A horse or a cow never provides; a calf or a colt may be born in a storm, and it's all one price to the mother. A horse really knows nothing of weather; when the wind veers, the horse's tail waves the other way, but the horse shows no sign of knowing north from south. The cow at least hoists her heavy head and blows and then eats grass contentedly again, or if she is lying, she gets up, blows, turns and lies down facing the other way. She salutes the change in the weather, and does nothing about it. People say: "The wind is changing: Look at the cows." Poor beasts, they can only take their troubles precisely as they come.

The pig takes sunshine as it comes, just as if it was meant for him. But he senses a storm, and gets ready. The pig knows; the feeling of a storm gathering got into his bones ages and ages ago, or maybe it was in the first blessed pig and belonged to him as pig, and now it is as proper to him as his tail or snout. We say: "Storm coming: look at the old sows." The pig is never a mistaken weather-man. Almost looking up, and leaning a little into the wind, the

pig runs squeaking, we might say, he gives out such a reproachful December squeal; he snatches a crooked mouthful of straw, then another mouthful, and tries to stack it up in his own way against the sharp north wind.

Choicy and smart as they are, pigs do not decide who will go to market and who will stay at home. But at that, they are not picked for the market; those that are to be kept at home are the selected ones. The most promising gilts are taken early from the common run, and will have the honor of mothering next year's crop of pigs. Then three or four others begin to be set aside, at least in the farmer's mind; these will be butchered. The first honor goes to these.

"How about that barrow hunched there by the fence? Looks slick to me. What do you say?"

"Not a bad pig, but he runs a little warty down low on the far shoulder. Here, look at this fellow asleep here. Ain't he a pig!"

The leftovers, not scrawny or runty, not teaty old sows, and yet not quite the top pigs, go to market. They ride off steaming and grunting in wagons and trucks on a winter day; in August they go before dawn or even soon after midnight. It used to be that a farmer would herd his shoats, as many as a hundred of them, for four or five miles to the boxcars; the little sickly man, outwearing the neighborhood, was fond of this method. Now all hogs go by truck and not one pig in a hundred ever hears a train whistle; they go direct from farmer to packer; the big yards in Chicago and St. Louis hardly ever get a load from our part of the country; trucking and local packing pays better.

See the lad looking at the block and grunting, or maybe two or three lads. So far as they know, innocent fellows, they are as safe as the hogs in the open field. These are the shoats that rate first, for today they are to be butchered.

A fire is burning in the yard to heat stones and old chunks of iron, and these are to heat the water for scalding. The lad is hardly stuck and down when he is thrown, with the warmth and quiver of life still in him, into the boiling

water. He goes in headfirst, and the men grab him by the heels and tail and work him up and down; then he is pulled out onto a platform and turned, and in he goes tailfirst, and an iron hook is caught in his jaw, inside, to churn him up and down again; of course, if the fat and baggy body ever were to go in wrong end first, the men would find the hot slippery heels and tail hard to handle.

In no time he is lying a dead scalded pig with patches of the hair abraded from him. He is being scraped now with corn cutters and butcher knives, and, as the bristly hair comes off, the pelt is left shiny white except where it may have got burnt in the scald. Then he is hoisted, and a piece of clean wood called the gimbal stick is run through the tendon of one heel and over the low limb of a tree and through the tendon of the other heel; there he swings, every bit of him except the blood and hair. Then his head comes off, and the trotters; these would only be in the way of the workmen. Then he is slashed from tail to throat in the belly. As the entrails come tumbling down into a kettle, the hot liver and heart are cut out of him and thrown into a pan and got ready for supper. Water is slushed through him, and he is left to cool.

Work for everybody. People all the time on their toes. Boys running to get knives and whetstones, men we might almost say twirling the shoat, the women's hands warming hardly a second under their aprons. By nine that night the lad, stiff and already half frozen, is laid on a block and the lard torn from him in stringy flakes; without any delay the parts of him, hams and sides and shoulders, are stacked up till morning. The lard will be rendered tomorrow.

People have fresh meat, and of course their own lard. Most of the meat used to be smoked and salted down, but now it is packed in jars where it keeps well. Poor people in towns and villages don't know how foolish they are not to butcher, what an overhead they pay at the shop; besides, half the time they have to do without meat.

The greedy and dirty pig, able to fill man's belly, is the same gent who pays the rent. Or he ups and lifts the mort-

gage. He does, if anybody does. And he is not mean about it or slow to do it. A poor farmer has ten, twenty or thirty pigs running around the place in spring and summer, and almost any farmer plans a litter or two for the fall; a few half-grown shoats let loose around the lots will see that cattle waste no corn. A good sow brings five, six, ten or more pigs, and saves from one to ten. A sow of ours got the name Old Tenny from saving ten pigs year after year. Too many or too few pigs may arrive; and we may be sure it was no new thing when in the 1930's we got too many pigs in a whole state or the nation, either too much corn and too few pigs, or a light corn crop and a heavy crop of pigs; the demand for pork holding off, and the pigs coming on—these are old acquaintances of the farmer's.

When prices take a turn for the better, the people say, "The pig is looking up," a thing that in a physical sense a pig never does; but when the bottom drops out of the market they credit him with his natural methods, for they say: "The pig is running his nose into the ground." If the market holds at all, he is ready and willing to carry his burden. But, poor fellow, he has been seen sometimes stooping under the load. Wise and sufficient though he is, in the hard times even the pig is over-matched.

If the cholera hits him, down he goes and all ourselves with him. Then he is worth nothing, and less than nothing, for he is a carrier of disease. He doesn't get sick, he just lies down and dies; fields of pigs die, and all day, no matter which way the wind is, the stench of scorching pig flesh and boiling grease is on the air. This is the holocaust. After the corn itself, the pig is the crop; and now farms of pigs have to be burnt. Yet though all a man's hogs die, no one is ever to give him so much as a little pig; at least that is the saying with our old Irish farmers. Men may butcher hogs and sell or trade hogs, and they may burn them, if need be, by the gross, but no man is to give away a runt or his tiniest sucking pig. To spend the last penny is to lose your luck in general, and to give away a pig is to give away your luck with hogs.

Of course, all of us raise corn and oats, sometimes wheat, sometimes soybeans, and most of the time molasses. Some have sheep, some have mules, and all have horses and cows. The crop nevertheless is corn and hogs. Everything else is secondary. And the real hog farmer is distinct, a type; that is, if he keeps to hogs.

He is always lank, the knees bend a good deal, his hand is caked like a hillock that has been worked in wet weather, he stoops from the hips, and more from the shoulders, and even somewhat at the chin; he is more a slab than a barrel of a man. His words are short, his voice whangy, he pronounces "hogs" with a long *o*: a sort of "ho-ogs." He shouts, "Whu-u-ey! Whu-u-ey!" and as the drove comes loping through the dust to him, he has a friendly word: "Pig! Pig! Pig!" Then at last he chums and pals with them: "Piggy! Piggy! Piggy!" They know his voice and he knows the smell of them. He is a sure firm man standing with his feet on the ground; his gaze does not rise easily above the fields and woods, and the sunniest day is only fair.

Still, if he is a good Iowa pig-man, neither he nor any of his pigs is mangy. He feeds the sow on bran mash when she pigs, and the little ones of course look out for themselves and feed on the sow. No inborn revulsion takes hold of him when he sees pigs rooting up the pasture, for he knows that it is the way of healthy pigs; as fast as he can get around to it, he fences the place hogtight and lets the shoats have the run of the cornfields in late autumn and follow the steers all winter so as to grow big and rough on the droppings.

The mange does not strike men and pigs that live in that way. But men take notions of being piggish—though no pig ever condescends to imitate any man. There is a sort of realistic sense in the story of the little girl who tells a neighbor man that it is possible to make out her father in the pig-lot because he has a hat on, and neighbors of ours were said actually to have their own manginess. These people, father and four sons, stayed in the house all winter, behind the kitchen stove, and emerged in the spring "like

mangy pigs from under a strawstack." The saying was true enough of the people, though perhaps not quite fair to the pigs, and the one who said it, if she did have a trigger of a tongue, was a saint of a woman and had a profound interest in all the joys and sufferings of the neighborhood.

Well, those men who take after the hog are the exception. Nearly all our people effectively rate the hog, wise and important though he is, as just a main cog that helps to turn the human mill.

CHAPTER IV

The Orchard's an Honor to the Family

AN ORCHARD, if mothered and really looked to, will grow up an honor to the family. But it demands a faith and care not had by every man. For instance, the lean humanist had just the kind of orchard anyone would expect. It grew on a steep slope, really up a hillside, back of the cave that he had dug into the hill. The cave is gone now, not a sign of it left; and so is the orchard. His trees never took a hold, never had push or fight in them, never made apples. The enterprise of buying little baby trees, of looking after them from head to foot, of wrapping them in the early winter in cloths so as to shield them from rabbits—human as this is, it was too indirectly human for the man who more than most of our neighbors lived completely in terms of people.

Mary Ann has always had apples, not a big orchard but a few winesaps and jennets on a slope facing the sun and kept from the northwest wind by the big blackoaks just beyond her place.

Almost every family plants an orchard. It is a sign that people have come to stay. Some one knows how, or goes ahead and finds out how, to set trees, to prune trees, to bring them through the first winter or two; most likely it is the father or a boy, but a woman can do it; in any case, the raising of an orchard is a family project; each member in some way helps to plant it, each is concerned with its promise, each knows well when one of its trees at last pushes out a few blossoms and puts on three or four timid little apples. Of course, alongside the big wheat farmer and the corn and hog farmer, the poor orchard man's work in our region is trifling and has nothing to recommend it but its human quality.

Once orchards have taken a good hold of the earth and their narrow bodies have begun to thicken, they will last a long time. This is truest of certain types of fruit. Apples are hardy, and pears and plums are exceedingly tough. It is at the start that apple trees give trouble. They had better be watched then; it is almost as if they had to be taken into the kitchen and kept like a lamb or young turkeys behind the stove. The ground ought to be patted and tamped down firmly around their little roots; it ought to be weeded and cultivated, but if people are short on land they can plant garden or potatoes between the rows of trees. The first summer or two the trees may need to be watered at night, and old sacks or straw kept over the damp soil in the day.

They have to be pruned for years, and to be watched closely for borers, the cordlike worms that appear in the trunk just at the ground, in fact almost in the roots, and are to be taken out at once with the point of a knife-blade. Otherwise the tree is killed.

Because that bit of care is demanded, we see everywhere little pieces and rags of orchards: somebody began a work and lacked the time or devotion to finish it.

In four or five years, even the poorest trees begin to tell their story. But it is yet just a promise, it is what we call a show for a crop. They must still be manured, and then they may by good chance bear fruit. We have set them out in the beginning, and now they at last set themselves: they grip the earth. And once they have got so far, they look after themselves. That is the way with the kinds mentioned, though whatever a man does the peach has no long life in it.

When we did not yet have any orchard, at least not many big healthy trees bearing, we used to go—and welcome!—to The Granger's mother's for apples. As we have said, it was the place to go, not only for apples, but for a sense of power and sufficiency and order. We were told at home to go and when to go.

Our mother said, "A couple of ye lads get ready and go over now tomorrow afternoon, and get some apples."

We did not have to be told twice, in this case. We went on Old Kit, a provident flea-bitten white, older than either of ourselves, a mare that was fond of home and knew her way back from any direction ten miles out. Our trail was at first across our own fields, as familiar to us as our faces, down past the first well and the lower well, then kitty-cornered into some of the farms of The Granger's people, then straight along a hedge, through forty after forty and through half a dozen wire gates. That landed us on prairie, in sight of the orchard and house. What was the August sun to boys on their way to The Granger's for apples?

Pie might be left from the noon-dinner of the hands, and we got generous pieces of it, though to tell the truth we were used to good pie at home, big motherly pies cut in fours, and at our house fault was found with a neighbor who cut common pies in fives or sixes for the threshers. More likely one of the big women gave us half-loaves of buttered or creamed and always sugared bread; the sugar was white, and never brown, at our late date; and the bread was white and light. Perhaps our own bread was as good, it was always white and never heavy, the pieces were not stingy, the butter was as good as anyone's; but it was our everyday bread, and molasses was put on it, and no sugar unless occasionally brown sugar.

We had a sack with us, a grain-sack or a shorts-sack, and we were told to fill it with the best apples. "Here," one of the big girls would say, "grab it tight by the ears, one of ye, and sack it up, let ye." She had a competence as she worked, a power that knew its way; she didn't hurry and she didn't waste a second. "There, now," she said at the finish. "That's as full as it will carry safe over the old mare's back, and the two of ye on behind." Kids didn't know how to do it, and she took things out of their hands. "Be careful! That's got to be tied tight. Here, let me do it. Sure, an' they'd be scattered from here to there, all over the main road."

She put us safely out the gate and told us which way to turn. "An' go home, let ye, all the way around the road, up by Jack's Corner, and not through all them wire-gates; because once ye'd get off, the sack would be on the ground, and the two of ye'd never get this outfit up on her back again."

We knew that she knew; besides, we had been given just those orders before we left home. No need for us to pry into the sack, as our pockets were full of harvest apples. With all the business done, the big woman said kindly, "An' tell yer mother to come over and see us, some day soon." What a visitor, here or anywhere, would do would be to come and work with a neighbor; most likely they would sew and then get supper together; in that way they could talk most of the time.

Those generous neighbors are scattered to the ends of the earth now. Their big old orchard stands to this day, and of course in large part does not stand. It is like a weary and lonesome thing, and for a generation has been going down stick by stick. It was well walled in, on three sides by hedge and on the fourth by the maples that stood between it and the long old house. But time and lack of care—we might say lack of faith in trees, and a consuming faith in fields and corn and mules and cattle—this was what wrecked it and was bound to wreck it. More than one sawing of wood has been made from the dead trees. It is not true to say with an oldtimer that there is not a tree of it left standing, and yet as I passed it not long ago the dead stuff made me feel as if it had been girdled, and though the time was summer something wintry seemed to have taken possession of this old friend. There it was, more than half dead, the place that had been a forest of sweet-smelling fruit. The one commercial orchard that we eventually knew was bigger, but no home orchard in our neighborhood ever was comparable to this.

Our own little sticks of trees began in time to do well. Four of them standing in a square west of the cave—a combination cave and cyclone cellar—started to bear. They

and their apple after them had an Indian name, something that I am not sure I precisely recall; it began with a *w*, and was like Wapseka. The apple was whitish with green and red streaking back from the stem; and though not dry, it was hard; the peculiar thing about it was that toward the core the meat changed and was of a water-green tint like honeydew melon.

Personal names attached to most of the trees we first had, undoubtedly because we knew the persons from whom we got the stock as gifts or as little purchases. The Johnny Daley trees were the next to go to work, the two of them, one growing out of the side of the cave where it was in fact standing when the cave was dug and built. So far as we know, these two trees yet bear; the apple comes in summer, very early, an apple red at the stem, flecked with green at the sides and gosling-green at the butt; it is only medium hard, but juicy and tart.

In a dozen years or so, our orchard stood on its own feet. No one would say it was a fruit farm, and it was never meant to be that. It was our own little orchard, planned at our kitchen table, planted by ourselves, pruned and kept by no one else, an intimate part of the family. Once we got a hundred dollars for apples, but we did not raise apples to sell; besides, our family was big, and was soon breaking up into several families, and we could hardly give half a bushel to the neediest neighbor. The apples were put away in the cyclone cellar, in big square boxes and old barrels; they were eaten in the autumn afternoons and almost every evening all winter. They were close to us, and the orchard itself was not like a far-off and rented thing, but something we had made, a thing almost identical with home. A neighbor woman who did not want to be in any photo was snapped by one of the girls on a summer evening in the orchard where she sat under a tree stemming gooseberries, the man alongside and wise to the event. That was a proper and home-like place for them, and for the calf that stood there nibbling grass.

One tree was alone in its kind; it was the Maggie Mor-

rison tree. It bore late in summer, and its apple was whitish yellow and hard, the taste like a banana and tending to be lifeless. We had no winesaps, an apple that is thinskinned but with a brightness and liveliness of taste. Nor did we have the maidenblush, a mild, juicy and soft apple. We had the Iowablush, which is a pale yellow, a poor apple, not a good keeper. Louis' and Jim's people had the tailend of an orchard, and in it one wolfriver tree was left; it bore tremendous apples which we all said were as big as half-gallon buckets. We had the jennet, the gano, the greening, and the famous ben davis, all of them hard apples fit for winter. The jennet is an ugly thing to see; it is a dark green with tiny white specks as if it were permanently sprayed; actually it has a poisonous look, but it is a good keeper and in the late winter it is likely to be the only solid apple left in the cave.

Most of these are choice apples, good for pie and sauce and ready to be eaten out of the hand. But with us one apple is best. It is the jonathan.

We had no reason to grant, because we never so much as guessed, that any apple could match it. The jonathan had and retains its own place in our affections. When we thought of frost in the late spring and planned a smudge against it, our care really was for the jonathan. When we got a choice empty box or barrel, we knew what we would save it for, and when we had neighbors come to see us on a winter evening, we knew beforehand which apples would come up out of the cellar.

As everybody knows, the jonathan is a deep red that is nearly black toward the stem; not a large apple but medium, round and not squared off and not falling away into a sheep's nose. The meat is firm, and is of one kind from the skin to the core. It keeps rather well, and can be rubbed glossy any time all winter. Our jonathans sometimes took the prize at the town Fair, and so did our display of apples, and once or twice our general display of farm products.

At last we had an old orchard of our own, and then we set out a new orchard alongside it. The old one had about

forty trees, and the new had exactly forty-eight. These new trees were planted in straight lines, rowed each way. I helped our father with them from the first, and knew not only each kind planted but the health and vigor of every tree.

I was allowed to take one little tree as my own. It had been a re-plant, bought from an old nurseryman who drove around in a buggy. Every tree we got from him, except this one, died; and the boss of our farm and orchard did not care then whether this one died or not. Because of its associations, it had an unfair hate conceived against it and then it had more hard luck; it was too close to where the cattle came and went, and it got its leaves stripped off, and then one whole side was lopped off. The case for it now became hopeless; it was only half there, and our father, in many ways the best hand in the neighborhood with trees, abandoned it. Then I took charge of it, and was soon told it was mine to do with what I could. For one thing, it would never be much of an honor to the orchard, but it had life in it and deserved care. I boxed up the trunk and the one remaining branch, and, when cattle went by, stood as a guard to it. The poor tree survived, it pulled through, as we say, and came to be named after me. There it stands to these times, in spite of boys and pigs and weather, a healthy crooked thing bearing hard green apples.

The neighborhood at home is full of old orchards, mere fragments of orchards found in open fields or in fence-corners. They tell of another day, when men and women lived on the land and owned land. Not many new orchards are set out now, and in most cases it would no longer be possible to say who set out the old ones. Men leave orchards after them, for a short time reminders of themselves and of their day.

Big Man never planted a tree on the old place, but he nursed a few trees there. Below the loghouse where he was born and toward the creek named after our own family, were two or three choice trees, one of them a crab and the

others some small early apple; of course, they have followed him, and not a stump of them is left. On the Squire's place (taken over later by The Granger) stood a lone Siberian crab, as good a tree as Big Man's or any man's; this also is gone down the hill: it went ten years after the old log stable that had always manured it staggered under the weight of snow and wind. At the Collet place there were a few wonderful little trees—the apple was scabby, small and sweet, a spotted yellow; the house went first, before the memory of us children, then the apples, and at last the cottonwoods and maples. The Biddy Lynch orchard was a good one, in the best soil and well sheltered; but the old lady, going up to nearly a hundred, outlived the trees. Old Man Lawles, when he first heard of appendicitis, went and tore all his berries out by the root; but his apples were allowed to stand, and his early snow apples were especially good, and they were good for a long time; but now the orchard has been turned row by row into hoglots. On the Bush Ryan place, also, the summer apples are gone.

On the Dundon place, where Muck and Letty first rented, was a first-rate orchard, not a big one but enough for a big family. It had been cultivated when it was young, and our friend Muck, though a renter, cultivated it and pruned it. When we used to be shocking oats, we'd crawl through the hedge and have some of the maidenblush, and when we were cutting corn we had bushels of the winesaps. Yet something has happened to the Dundon orchard and place. The sheds went down, the house a good while ago was tottering, and the trees have been taking their turns. Hard times tell on a farm.

Once the planter has departed, it is not easy for orchard trees to hold their own. They cannot look after themselves, and if times weren't hard at all, time would take its toll. Weather is one thing that can be against trees, and insects, and storms. A tree drops, a gap is left; and no one greatly cares. Renters get the place, and turn the pigs in. Of course, no renter wants to destroy; what he wants is to let

the pigs pick up fallen apples. But most of us know that the pigs will stay in; and pigs root. With trees falling, the renter uses the axe: he has to have fuel. Then he plows up the more vacant spaces in order to plant an extra row of corn or potatoes, and he unfortunately lets the plow strike a little too close to the tender roots. Everything at last is on the downgrade. The leaves lose their color, apples become wormy, the stray colts rake off a branch or two. Now a June storm wind has only to hit the orchard, and we hear almost the last good trees crash.

When things are so far gone, we may be sure no one sprays or prunes and no one re-plants. The old orchard has had its day. The windbreak is cut down, and in April the orchard is plowed with the adjoining field and is made ready for the corn that will be checked into it. The next season, wheat or oats is drilled into this patch of ground, and then it goes, just like common land, into clover and hay and bluegrass. At last maybe one tree, bearing in the odd years a few wretched scaly little apples, stands in the field alone. It is at best a memory, no more than a marker, a kind of unlettered tombstone. The people—the quite good people—scarcely think of it; they connect it with no past, and it has no future. A man's work, outliving him for a time, will soon be no more than a few rotten sticks.

CHAPTER V

Keeping Our Heads Above Water

IN THE whole midwest till much less than thirty years ago, the people fed on corn and things grown and cooked at home. This was not because the people were continuous with the pigs and cattle, but because they were poor and above all because they understood farm life as family life, and family life as an economy of living almost totally within the farm. Expenses, if given a chance, would mount. But there was a sure way of keeping them down, and that was for the family to produce its own things.

Once in a while a family could not do this. The common case of failure was brought on by a spell of sickness; if the father was unwell, the family got behind with work and crops and payments, or if the children ran into typhoid or diphtheria, the doctor's bill got out of reach.

Yet these matters, though they might seem difficult, could be handled. The neighborhood took charge. In our own time, we often saw this done. A couple of men would "pass the hat" for a neighbor, and the head of almost any family gave fifty cents or a dollar. Nobody was insulted; it was the custom, and a good man could not escape sickness. Thus the family was bailed out and let start anew, all debts were paid and the family had something to go on, possibly twenty or thirty dollars. (Since the coming of the general and persistent depression, we are not able to do this; too many need help and too few can help.)

Almost everybody was poor. Poverty was the thing we commonly saw, and understood. But ordinarily with the help of God and the pig, people could carry the load, each family with its own burden. Taxes had to be paid, and the interest on the mortgage; a couple of times a year our own father and mother were in solemn conference as to how

these bills, never possible to postpone, were to be met. Life was serious, yet all could be managed if people kept their eyes peeled. The store bill ran up, and was big for any family that did not make the most of produce. And there was that far-off and unlikely event, a payment that might be made to reduce the mortgage. Our father was twenty-one years in paying for a poor rough place; at best it was not a place greatly enviable; but it was something that all that time he stayed even with store bills, doctor bills, taxes, harness, interest; and the neighbors were so kind as to say he had made his farm into one of the best improved small farms around: he had a house built largely by himself, his own two little orchards, his own fences, at first all of rails and always partly of rails; a log stable roofed with straw, and eventually a barn built by himself and the boys, sheds and cattle barn of native lumber logged in the winter by themselves; all in all, a home-made farm.

Shoe bill—including the bill for the brass-toed leather boots that were so hard on feet; store bill, doctor's bill—money, when it appeared at all, existed just to stand between people and the threat or pressure of these things. We stretched the few silver dollars a long way, and we did without. These were the universal arts, doing without and making a little cash take us to the end of the year.

Children were never given money to spend for candy. But at our house they were given store candy, gumdrops and sticks and beanies, once or twice a month, and they had put into their hands ten or fifteen cents or as much as a quarter for the Fourth and again for the Fair. Some older people, naturally of big families, say they always got twenty-five cents each for the Fourth. Our mother used to tell us that she and her brothers and sisters were once given a quarter apiece for the Fourth, and when they came home with pitiable stories about John Robinson's wife, about the poverty and *onreough* on her, and our grandmother was asking each child what he had spent his quarter for, one of them said: "I gave mine to John Robinson's wife!" which, as we used to say, was a "likely" story; that

is, he did no such thing. Well, we did not get twenty-five cents each, and we know that with some of the neighbors the children got only five cents each and sometimes not even that. People were not especially stingy; they simply did not have cash. Through most of the year the father and mother merely remembered money, and did not hope to see any great gobs of it.

People could make out. They knew hunger and a little fear on the one hand and as a rule a sufficiency on the other. But they knew neither starvation and prolonged suffering, nor luxury and surplus. Things were skimpy; and for all that, it was only in 1927 and afterwards that we ever saw any of our people in dire want with next to no chance to get out.

Up to that time, men and women did eat rough food, to be sure, and they grew rangy and lean. Fat men were scarce, and we think they are scarcer now. Most families had sausage in winter, yet only for a few days and not for the season; some saw very little of it. At home we ground it in a mill borrowed from a neighbor and turned by hand.

Breakfast throughout the cold weather was not sausage but fried mush. This was had in every house and not only in our Irish neighborhood but commonly throughout Iowa, and it was always made of the meal of white corn. The meal was boiled for two or three hours the evening before in a pot or kettle to which some of it stuck in thin scales or flakes, and when it was nearly cooked it puffed up and at last just seemed to plop and blubber. At our house, only our mother liked the hot boiled mush, which is eaten before it is set thicker than cream, and she preferred it with milk fresh from the cow. But at nearly every breakfast and at many suppers in every household, they had mush; fried or boiled, it went a great way in saving flour, and did not have to be bought; the corn for it was raised at home and ground for a toll. Of course we also had corn bread, usually called corn dodger. But this was not in favor. Once an old woman, of one of the last Irish families to arrive, came to borrow flour from our

grandmother, saying that when she had served corn dodger four mornings straight the children rebelled and threw pieces of it at her.

In the early winter, people had ham and bacon with the mush, then toward the new year or perhaps not long after Thanksgiving all but the poorest would kill a beef and leave the quarters hung frozen in old smoke houses where they cut from it with knife and saw as they needed; two or three families went partners in killing and sharing the beef. The best shoats were butchered, and with us the best tom turkey was kept for Christmas day. But for some reason not easily known people kept out for themselves only a poor scrubby beef, the kind called a cull: a scrawny potbellied heifer or a tough old canner. And we Irish always felt, justly or not, that the Hoosier families among us were scrawny, under-nourished and inbred: our word was "bred out"; that they had only two meals a day and seldom any meat except rabbit!

Most important with the mush was not beef or bacon, but molasses (we had heard the word sorghum but did not use it, and we wondered at people who thought molasses a plural). Every family grew its own cane and in mid-September made it up; that is, made it into molasses, filling a barrel, a beer-keg, two or three jugs and crocks and pans. We had it everywhere, a treacherous stuff, a kind of tangle-foot when we went to draw it, but it is wholesome, and we always thought it luscious. Be sure our family looked with no great joy to the March day when the last of the hundred gallons, turning now to sugar, was scraped out of the barrel for the last of the season's mush. We used to say, "What is mush without molasses?" And what would breakfast be minus these two?

So the people managed to live through the winter and were in shape for the spring plowing. They were like a cow that "got on the lift" in winter, the kind of which we said, "If she just lives to see the grass!" That was not exactly the case with people, but we were glad to have the new greens: the tops of horse radish, the weed we called mus-

tard, and also lambs-quarter and crows-feet. All the better farmers, the hard-working ones with cows and chickens and some claim to land, had had fresh eggs and milk and their own butter through most of the winter, but nothing now for a long time in the way of fresh vegetables. Likely, too, the apples were played out by midwinter. Potatoes and cabbage and turnips were sunk into a pit in the yard, a grave or trough lined with leaves and covered with straw and dirt and horse manure, and they acquired a kind of general flat taste. Early in the spring it was easy to have greens, and very soon the winter onions, nursed at the feet of young apple trees, were ready.

Farmers in Iowa and the whole grain belt have and deserve the reputation for neglect of gardens. Only a few things, as a rule, are attempted: onions, a lifeless lettuce, radishes. The stuff is poorly looked to, grows raggedly on its own, and comes in late. Things that can be put in the field, such as potatoes, have a better chance; and also such things as gooseberries and wild honey, because they look after themselves.

One way or another, the women of a farm family find food to put on the table, and they like to do it and even to make a display of it, stacking up much of many kinds for threshers or road graders. Corn is easily had in the milky stage, and in recent years is canned; longer ago than I recall, it was turned into home-made hominy. Roasting ears are picked in what we call the field corn, that is, the horse corn; and they say that when the railroad was being double-tracked one of our Irishmen used to carry eight roasting ears for each horse's lunch and ten for his own.

In our family I was the one who had the reputation for finding the good patches of wild berries. The blackberries are of course what we mean. These grow everywhere: in new seeding that hasn't caught very well, along shady fences, along big ditches, in idle fields, and in stumpy cut-over land. A person comes to have a sense for where they should be, and where they will be next year, for the patches move around. Big Man's foster father, a man

greatly stooped at the shoulders and again at the hips, appeared as he walked to pick himself up and set himself forward; it was this man that knew the berry patches; he seemed to have every bush numbered, and he could find a gallon of wild dewberries even the driest years. My own best find was a patch in Kileyer's back forty, deep in the rich soil of a sway in the thick woods; there the tall bushes, grayish purple on the stalk, rose up like poles and then fell gracefully over till the ends rested on the ground. They were well shaded by oaks and a few hickories, and didn't ripen till late in August.

The may-apples ripen also at that time, and I think I never have seen them except in that forty. One's first notice of them is the odor. He is leaving iron-weed and hazel and wild slough-hay and the heat that goes with all these, and entering the cool woods, when he catches may-apple on the air. The smell is like over-ripe banana, but wilder; the taste is too rich and soft for most people. Likewise near that timber forty, is native fern which I took up once and planted in shade at home, and for several seasons it survived, but it didn't spread and eventually died out. Blue-bells also can be transplanted, if their new location is in quite deep shade.

Just within our memory the wild turkey still ran in this timber. Our father was fond of hunting them, and followed them whenever the law allowed (in fact, he and the game warden stretched the law). One day he brought home two turkeys, and I was the one sent to our grandfather's to invite everyone to Sunday dinner and to get a pan they had big enough to cook the turkeys in. This grandfather stayed close to the land and did not believe a farmer was ever to be a hunter. But he said, "*Two wild turkeys, you say! My! Your father is a great hunter.*"

At each meal time our mother used to come almost on her hands and knees carrying a gallon crock of milk up out of the cave. She managed it on the open hand or gripped between thumb and forefinger, which is not an easy task, since the wrist soon cramps or the fingers slip on the rim

of cream left around the inside. Yet we do not recall that there ever was a spill or a splash. Five boys drank most of the gallon of milk, dipping it up with a tin cup out of the crock; three times a day they drank it and never knew the taste of coffee.

The cave was a cyclone cellar, designed and built by ourselves. At first it was mere slabs covered with earth. But this kind of cave leaks, and later we made it of cement, the sides straight and squared, the roof domed over like the hip-roof of a barn, both roof and sides warty and uneven because the pieces of board we picked up for the form were that way.

We grew up not knowing grace at meals, and we thought it a kind of Protestant thing to stand and pray. In fact, we knew nothing about "Hoosier prayers," except that a couple of times we had heard what seemed to us very sad, made-up prayers at non-Catholic funerals, and once some Hoosiers from Illinois visited a convert in a neighbor family and sang "Rock of Ages, cleft for me!" I took the word "cleft" for a verb, and for years wondered what the action called "clefting" is and how a rock could do it. So we were embarrassed when we ate with people who stood and prayed over their food, and when we learnt that grace was thoroughly Catholic we nevertheless sat to say it. We worked before breakfast, and when we came to the meal, after bringing horses and cows out of dewy or frosty fields, and feeding and milking, we were hungry. Each of us then, when face and hands were washed, flopped down at his chair, his lean body half lying, and said his private though semi-public morning prayer before the meal and the day's work. Our older sister was big enough to help with the house work, and had something of a reputation as a "ready-up." Our little sister was the youngest of the family; she and I sat on a bench along the wall and back of the table: she had trust only in me, as the other boys used to rock the bench and pretend it was going to fall. The bench was made at home to save money and chairs, and was kept beneath the table.

Before the War, country people had few store things. They couldn't have them, didn't need them, and didn't want them. Life was more a making than a buying.

What was got was mostly exchanged for. People did their trading. "I have a nice roll of butter in the cellar, and I think I'll have twenty dozen eggs." That was the way our mother or any normal mother spoke. So she figured she could get calico this week for a dress, or perhaps oilcloth for the table, or a winter coat for the oldest boy, or jeans to make a couple of jackets, or cotton flannel for husking mittens; all the time she had to get sugar and flour and coffee. The days of grist and hominy and homespun were past. Of course, our mother remembered those days. She said the girls hated homespun and linsey-woolsey, and longed for calico; and she told us that when one girl—afterwards an attractive woman with six beautiful daughters—was made to put on a new linsey-woolsey dress, she crawled in underneath the bed and never reappeared till the dress was worn out. Our mother used to tell us of going with one of her eight brothers nearly twenty miles by ox wagon with a load of grist; they forded some creeks but when they had to wade the team across a creek, one ox stalled and lay down in the water. She also told us more than once of the last time she saw wild deer: three of them edging out of the woods on the flat south of Mary Ann's place.

There were poor years. People understood that and did not complain, just so that they did not come three or four years running. Times would be better, enough rain would come some season soon. Men and women waited for a good year to paint the barn and to fence a forty hog-tight. People were not well fixed but could make out another year.

We happen to know that they did not always have Sunday clothes, but they got to Mass every Sunday. It would have been an unbearable blizzardsly day when any of the families we have mentioned here would have failed to send some one to Mass, and those who had to stay at home knelt down during the time of the Mass and said

the rosary. To "tell the beads" is a phrase nearly foreign to us; to "say the beads" is proper, but to "say the rosary" is the common phrase. When we were about twelve and ten, my brother and I had just one suit, and he went one Sunday and I the next, an arrangement that left our mother very unhappy and mortified. Recently a neighbor woman, in fact Louis' and Jim's third sister, told me that she and a sister—and they were intelligent and fine looking girls—had only one Sunday dress between them, and sometimes not even that. And this family was not of the poorest, it was not landless, it had cows and chickens and probably always had enough to eat; as we knew its members, they had an extraordinary lot of humor, and good talk, poetry and games, and fiddling and dancing; and when the mother could get the goods, she and the girls knew how to make dresses and the girls knew how to wear them and to get and keep beaux.

No one ever travelled. By the time I was seventeen I had been just once to the county seat, seventeen miles away, by spring-wagon, to see a circus. By the time I was twenty-one I had been that far east and also west, by train, and not so far north or south, on horseback. It wasn't wholly that people were too busy or too poor. They had no business that would take them farther, and no need to go farther. Home was sacred and quite compact; it was almost everything to everybody. We did not have to be asked to love home—we did love it; nor to stay at home—we had no longing for distant and strange places. Home and neighborhood were nearly sufficient for food and clothes and shelter, and quite sufficient for entertainment.

Most people were poor, but hardly anyone was wretchedly poor, and no one that belonged to our neighborhood was allowed to suffer. Interest and taxes were the worst things; they could not be delayed. A man had to try to match his crop of pigs and calves fed on skim-milk against these bills which never slackened. It was a risky business, especially since the weather could take a hand on one side but not on the other. The crop might be short,

the wheat and corn and truck drowned out or all of it withered by a southwest hot wind. And the market could grow lean, too, and people did not hope to control it.

Even so, the little we had was mostly our own. It was raised in a field that was with some truth called our own. It was planned and planted by ourselves, it was picked by our own hands, it was canned and jelled at home, or fed and butchered in our own yard. We had reason to prize deeply what God and hard work gave us. We were far from being too sure of ourselves from year to year, but if panic and drought did not come at us we were free men, contented, and able to see our way.

IV

SHARING THE DROP OF WATER

CHAPTER I

Melon as Big as His Belly

NO ONE has ever known our people when they were not close together. Connaughtmen used to stand against Corkmen, but the era of that feeling has past. They all belong to The Rookery, the old name given to the Irish region, because of the rough land and the prolific people; they have their common little fetes, as on the Fourth of July; and in a drought or in calamities that hit only one family, they suffer together. Your lot is my lot, man might say to man, and your profit or suffering is also mine. That was the way when frontier life was man's life in Iowa, and happily in our Irish neighborhood it has always remained the way. We have mentioned the fact that no lone man was allowed to suffer, that is to say no family; people turned out and took care of the man's crops, and they pitched in to help him up if he was financially on his back.

Here is an instance. The Stump Man dearly liked to pound the table in a game of four-hand or six-hand euchre. One summer night we played with him and the hatchet-faced man who said of him that he had brought a farm out of the brush. The fourth man was Mart, of the couple famous in our neighborhood, Mart and Mary Jane. He played, she didn't; in an earlier day the custom was for only the men to play cards.

"I said he had the ace back, and we're euchred! But he had a sneak, and that's worse . . ."

So the talk went. At eleven or so, Mart and Mary Jane started for home in their wheezy Ford. And there in front of them, their own house was on fire.

Nobody was in it, and nobody was hurt. By the blessing of God, no one was hurt, and by the blessing of God they all got out of the house: two or three children were at

home, and the old man, an uncle of Mary Jane's, a man so old and automatic that when the biggest girl had carried and dragged him down the stairs he went back up, and she had to use a ladder to rescue him the second time.

We followed quickly, once they had started home in their car. The yard was full of people. And there was poor Mary Jane wringing her hands. "The house we were so long getting built! Now, glory be to God, what will we do!"

It was decided by the people that night what would be done. The insurance would buy lumber for a new house just like the old, and what the insurance would not do, the people would, by work and subscription. Mart and Mary Jane could live those few weeks with a neighbor.

And the people ought to see to the welfare of that family. For Mart's team and himself with his one good eye were always first and last in helping any neighbor. And nobody in the whole neighborhood ever compared with him and Mary Jane in taking the orphan into the house; they had a big family, but all their lives they were looking to the good of poor people. No one was an outsider to them. On a winter day, coming from J. J.'s, I stopped at Mart's because of a heavy cold; at once I was put deep into bed, and Mary Jane came with a hot broth, crumbs of bread dropped into it. And now I am happy to say that, long past their jubilee and a long time great-grandparents, they are as glad as ever to see good wheat in a neighbor's field, and Mary Jane's corn dodger remains quite easily the best in the neighborhood. They had not and have not much money, but they have always known how to think outside themselves and into the needs of others: the one-eyed Mart, long and straight and lithe, and red-faced Mary Jane with a spare tire at her waist.

That is the great case of neighboring, not letting a man down when he is out of luck; paying his bills, going on his note.

A bad neighbor—people are too charitable to use such a term. The most they say is, "not a good neighbor." They

don't like to say it; the man has to prove it against himself. Our own mother wouldn't let us say that or any like ill thing of a neighbor. She would catch us and stop us. "Ah, ah!" she would say: "the little neighbor!" Well, we would say, but it's true. That did not allow us to talk, or to say so much as one bad word. She replied briefly and laid down the law: "We are not judges. God alone knows."

Some that were well off did not exchange work with anybody, and in that sense did no neighboring. Yet most even of these came if anyone was sick, and they helped if a neighbor was in a bad way. Of just one family, people had to say: "They never go to funerals." It was as if they weren't people.

Americans have had several sayings, most of them still generally used or known, of boy and girl friend. We say they are "going together." Or "she has a steady." Or "that's a go." And "those two are solid."

Now, any of these nice friendly thoughts may be used of neighbor and neighbor. We mentioned earlier the instance of Big Man and his neighbor Tom, and the brotherly nearness they always had. And something akin to that is known among all of us. Every family has a few steadies, it is solid with some two or three or a dozen families. Family is going with family, as boy and girl keeping company. In fact, our whole neighborhood is solid. Good people don't have any bad neighbors.

Old Kirk was one of the best neighbors we ever had, honest, simple, never bluffing and never bluffed. His crooked short arm and the three stubbed-off fingers didn't lessen his friendliness. He stayed on his side of the fence, minding his business. He was not a Catholic till he was on his deathbed, and the most any neighbor had ever been able to get out of him was that he swore by God. Kirk knew how to plow and how to feed pigs and to neighbor. One day when two of us were tired and hot binding and shocking oats in a dusty field, Kirk came to us carrying in his crooked arm a melon as big as his belly. A tough man, well weathered, he made no fuss about such things: ah,

well, he would soon be hauling melons to the hogs. Twenty years later I saw him in his field plowing with a two-horse walking-plow, and he had stood up well under the years and work and the break in markets.

The neighbors will speak for a long time of Mrs. Finnerty, of whom a member of a big family says: "She saw every one of our family into the world." An old friend wrote, after Mrs. Finnerty's death: "She will be missed around Melrose." At that time we had an "official county paper," and this made a just report: "Her death marked the close of an ideal Christian mother's life. Almost all her life was spent in the neighborhood in which she died. She was a remarkable woman in many ways, always doing good to others." A young man, with very much of Mrs. Finnerty's social way about him, wrote in a letter, April 1, 1926: "Melrose sure lost its most charitable woman when Mrs. F. died. She done more work for less pay than anyone that ever lived in the town or I might say in any other town either." She was a small person, the mother of eight or ten children whom she fed and sheltered by washing other people's clothes and minding other people's babies. It is true that she had a sharp tongue, perhaps never unkind, but sometimes very effective.

A good neighbor does more than bid others the time of day. He is ready to help, as Muck and Letty always were. The good neighbor comes and offers himself. In case of need, anything he has is the other's: time and labor and sympathy. "Now if there is anything else we can do, you just call and let us know any time." It is not I, of course, but we: house helps house, and the family is an undivided block of helpers. I have seen them come from all sides to help a neighbor keep on its feet a horse struck by sleeping sickness; for once the horse goes down, it stays down. I have also seen them help to pull a run-down cow out of the ditch in spring, and I saw Big Man's foster father bring our own family two sacks of seed potatoes, already cut and ready to go into the ground, when ours had failed

because of bugs or drought the season before. Our things are your things, your luck is our luck.

In a man's hardest fix, perhaps the neighbor says nothing. He just comes and stands around. That is all, now, he can do, and he does it.

In the act of neighboring, it is every day that counts, and not merely the times of strain. Little offerings and gifts are always going back and forth. They are proofs of friendliness. A woman never goes emptyhanded to a neighbor's. That wouldn't be friendly. She takes along some little thing, a pat of butter, a mess of new potatoes, a tin of the best berries, spareribs when they have butchered, an apronful of lettuce or half-ripe tomatoes.

People used to say, "Sure, she's no neighbor at all. She wouldn't give your pigs a sack of buttermilk."

"She wouldn't—not even if she had it going to waste."

We had neighbors once who gave us a run for our money. They were poor people, poor managers, they had no land, no cow and few chickens, they lived from hand to mouth; as the saying is, from your hand to their mouth. They borrowed us out of house and home, their goslings parked every night on our well-curb, their horses, starving for salt, ate through the salt barrels in which our onions were stored. Our father was impatient, but our mother gave them things; and when it came to the pinch, then and twenty years afterward, our father defended them. And shiftless as they were, they could have a thought for their neighbors. For when their father came home from a raffle toward morning carrying two live geese, they would send us a platter of the meat the next day and a jar of goose grease for colds.

As we said, a few have always stood off, not going even to bury the dead. But for nearly everyone, neighboring means the matters we have mentioned and many other matters, such as going together to church, talking over the fence about the chance for a crop, making a big communal event of a wedding; it is the wedding of this boy and girl, it is a wedding within the family, but it is also a wedding

within the neighborhood and it belongs to everybody. So of funerals and wakes; and so of threshings and fairs and dances, events loved so much by Big Man, the Stump Man and all our people. It is not merely somebody's dance or somebody's wake, but in a real sense it is everybody's.

When Jim's and Louis' mother died, we got this word in a letter: ". . . all the old neighbors was very Good to us, and we Sure do value our neighbors in a time like this." And once a neighbor woman wrote to us: ". . . The funeral was Friday and the largest ever in that community or any other, and it should have been. There was 234 cars and the poor old Church was just packed and everyone was grief stricken. I tho't the neighbors at Pa's wake were wonderful, but when you get the Murrays¹ and Coughlins and Judges and Coadys together, they do it." Wakes and funerals—these express in part our respect for the living, and also for the dead and for the whole community and for God. A man who left our neighborhood and lost the Faith gave orders that his body be burned, an idea that is revolting to us: to get rid of men's bodies in the cheapest and quickest way is to dishonor man.

In the most technical form, of course, neighboring is a bare exchange of work between man and man. Taken in that way, it would not include the women's sewing together, or their oldtime quilting. In that way, it would occur only by a kind of contract or at least by agreement. Man would say to man, "I'll help you over your corn the last time, if you'll double-team with me in cutting the oats."

That is neighboring. It is the exchange of work—man for man, team and rack for team and rack—in threshing or in any farm operation. It is a good, practical and often a quite necessary procedure. Anyone will see, besides, how healthy and kindly an arrangement it can be. Then, as Mary Ann once expressed it in a lovely phrase, "Men follow along together and make talk." (What she said was that she does not like it when men do not follow along

¹ Including Mart and Mary Jane.

and make talk: that, she said, is not normal or exactly right.) A lot of men making talk at their work—that is good for men. And in certain types of work, it is indispensable.

But neighboring is more. It means looking to the good and happiness of the other. It means rejoicing and sorrowing with the other. It means bearing gifts. Of course in all and through all, it means love and the fear ever to hurt the “little neighbor.” Neighboring has always taken our people outside themselves. Is this because the Irish love God, and fear God? It could be so; but in any case they have great feeling for their neighbors, and almost a weakness for sociability. Look at the case of J. J.—finally taking a stove to the old crony!

An early frost is a communal event: it hits everybody’s tomatoes and late corn. But it hits some harder, depending on the lowness of the ground, and the kind of crop; and we feel more for them. A late spring is a common trial; everybody is made impatient, everybody wants to get into the fields. The “plates” a man is using in his corn planter is a concern to the neighbor; not a matter to be nosed into, but to be known and talked about: the question is, What will that soil stand—“twos and threes,” or “threes and fours?”

People with land next to each other, with children growing up together—with the women helping each other in preparation for new babies and in the actual births; with the children starting to a common school, learning to read and spell together, having little fights and making up, staging little plays; with everyone knowing the effects of good crops and short crops—knowing them indeed, that is to say feeling the effects; in such conditions is it any wonder that the social life becomes intimate and important? It is true that people can come to hate each other over just such things, and they do; but we have known hate, or any serious unfriendliness, as the exception. In our time at least, the people who didn’t care were those without land, and in that way without a lasting hold or stake; and

above all the people without children, some of the families of old bachelors and maids for whom the end of the world is at hand. Families make friends with families, they learn to live together; they understand when they talk in terms of children and grandchildren. For our own community is literally a "church": a group of people conscious of the neighbor's need, people shoulder to shoulder, ready to give for each other, and all of them with like beliefs about God and man.

Not long ago a poor man scarcely hanging on to rented land, said of a neighbor family: "They're poor enough, God knows, and no one can make out how they hang on to their place. And at that, we never had such neighbors." In our family word, the woman was a "good flathul": a big capacious person, and generous. The man said so: "Never a baking is done in that house that she don't come carrying us a loaf."

That is what we have always known as neighboring. In good times the people would come and did come, and in hard times they come. The people have not changed. At any rate, some of them have not.

Anyone would like what a friend living in that neighborhood wrote to me. I had told him I did not know when I would come for a visit or how long I could stay. He replied: "we want you to come as soon as you can and stay as long as you can."

And what an old woman in the neighborhood said about a new woman, was as good in style and in friendliness. The old woman—it is a dozen years ago—was Louis' and Jim's mother, and what she wrote was this: "She is the oldfashioned kind, a good neighbor." That sentence guaranteed everything.

I found the report true. The young woman said, "Don't you know, we have the best neighbors. You'd think we were their own family, the way they see we have everything." And in fact I have seen her and them making their little trades in gifts and in good wishes. Something comes from the oven or the garden of one family. "We heard you

— company, and brought you something," says the neighbor.

"Oh, for goodness sake!"

"It's nothing, no more than a bite."

"Oh, you shouldn't keep bringing so many things. Well, we thank you ever so much. But we should raise them ourselves. Now don't bring any more; it's surely our turn. And don't forget: one of these days we'll be baking something special, or something good will be coming up in our garden."

CHAPTER II

Join Your Partners and Promenade All!

EXPERTS would say that Letty is a good dancer in the sense that she likes or has liked to dance, but Muck was never known, since he came to our country, to put a foot on the floor. The Stump Man dances, especially at home with a daughter; and he has a story of a dance he attended just to see the antics of a bachelor and his old maid friend. These persons arrived one by one. The bachelor came late and said: "Oh, are you here?" And the maid said sheepishly: "Yes, are you here? Are you going to dance?" and he giggled and said: "Oh, I don't know. Are you?" The lean humanist also danced in his time; and when he was above eighty, I asked him about his courtship days, and learnt—what I thought: that he went around and drank a little and danced less; it was in '76 or '77 that he married; his wife who, he said, was "awful small," danced some; "ah-hum," he said, "she did. . . . No, not an ox team, but a team of horses, that's what I drove that day to the church. And we danced after the dinner, danced in the house at home."

Dances go with weddings, and they follow picnics and fairs. We used to have barn dances in the summer: these were merely dances held in barns. Even at that time, however, we had a K o' C hall. Then when new roads were built, dances were tried at the crossroads, but without any success. At last because of an astounding state championship in basketball, we have a new hall, built by the WPA, and people dance there, and even occasionally have "dawn dances." Nearly all dances held in town have for years and years been for the church.

A long time ago I went from J. J.'s one night to a dance

in a new house overlooking White's Creek, and shall try to give in detail the sort of event that dance was.

The place was awkward to reach. A person went north-east up a hill on a white-clay road till, half way to the top, he turned to the left into a field, some sort of worn-out pasture, and then kept sidling off west and a little north in a kind of lefthanded way nearly to the brink, and there was Bill Mack's and Effie's new house built like a shoulder on the hill.

Joe Egbert had got ready and came along. He had shaved the day before, had laid his short gray sticks of hair back taut, and had greased his shoes. His suit, not of any color, not black or blue or brown, was as heavy as leather and sat unevenly on him. His face was sallow and so thin that people could see the muscles working in it. What seemed funny to us at home was that old Joe wanted a girl and expected to find one. A dance was the place to go. The two of us looked forward to the event, as all the neighbors did. We planned on it. We'd been shucking in J. J.'s bottom, and for three weeks in advance we used to shout from our loaded wagons, especially in the evenings, over to the Dippold boys, Tad and Kade, and ask them whether they were going and what night Bill Mack had fixed for the dance.

At the last minute Joe and I decided to go horseback, though half an hour would have taken us up and down over the ends of the hills above the Creek. We went up the dark timber road past Seldom Seen school, on past Sam's square box of a house, and then a road met ours and the two of them took off in a northeasterly direction down some small hills, all the time making in general toward the Creek.

Joe always spoke in a hoarse tight tone, as if he had some unexpected trouble with his throat. "Here she is now, here's the gate," he said, as if we were uncertain of this ground. We pulled our horses haw into the field and came to the dance.

Bill Mack, a thick-set short man with jaws that had

great knobs at the hinges, was giving the dance. He belonged and didn't belong to us, for he was one who married outside the community, and that meant he had married a Hoosier. For a month he had been inviting us all to the dance: "Just as soon as the house is ready, and I hope it's before winter." It was in December, a Saturday night in Advent; yet I had to go and wanted to go.

The man was quick and earnest in every sound and step of his greeting. So, in intention at least, was Effie, a blond thin woman poorly put together, long in arms and legs and face. Bill Mack bounced around, Effie came along like a piece of trailed string. She was one of the Wamman girls from far down the bottom eight or ten miles, and we never did see any of her people except a brother who one snowy day drove a team of blue-roan mares up the Ridge. The Stump Man's fidgety mare was out of one of these.

The dancing was hard, and everyone got his share of it. Ike and Em Hooper were there. So were the Dippold girls, Fern and Lizzie, in red faces that must have been oiled. Also the Slav Anna, the maid at J. J.'s house, a big mountainy girl of sixteen, her face mulched with talc. Early in the winter evening, one of the Dal Richmond boys had come and taken her, one might say by force, she was so big, and walked her the four or five miles around by their place to the dance. That was the sum of the dancing girls, these three and the two women. The Graney girls were there, walled up in blue; but everyone knew that neither of them danced. The bucks were eight or nine, counting in Bill Mack and Ike.

In fact, the dancing had to be hard. The event was a house-warmer, and the house, yet un plastered and no stove in it, was as cold as the loft of a barn. Every man and woman, except Bill Mack and Effie, danced with all their things on. Joe Egbert said a day or two afterwards that he danced "so plague take it much" that he couldn't walk for a week. Be sure too that people went there to dance and not to sit looking at each other. The plan had been to run two sets and to use the two rooms of the house, but as it

was we could run only one and just one girl could rest at a time. We crammed into one room, stuffed the door and window tight, squared off and danced.

Ike Hooper danced in felts. It is a safe bet that they were the only shoes he had, and they were all he needed. The felts, more shoe than stocking and more boot than shoe, were not uncommon wear then: soft big things of a hempen, ropy look, and covered over, half way up, by all-rubber goloshes; I recall how the lean humanist's legs used to drag along after him, in felts. Ike was a rangy man, and tended to stoop. His stack of sandy-gray hair toppled over a little to the left, and gave him an unbalanced physical look, though his mind certainly was calm. The twenty years they had been married, Ike had not touched a plow or pulled a ragweed or cockleburr. He propped, and his outfit was so well known that some people lately told me they still recall it. He teamed up an old dun mule with a rat-tailed mare, and made some cash now and then propping. I was never in Em's house, but the women claimed that the pig cleaned up what fell from the table. They had only five or six children, all of them lank and scary.

Em knew how to chew, and she knew how to dance. A couple of times a week Joe and I had seen her pass where we shucked, and always she carried a half-gallon pail: on her way with buttermilk for her brothers Jack and Joel Magin and to scrub their kitchen; so she said; but as these boys made liquor for the new miners, most people had another theory.

Tonight she was dressed in a long cottony-looking skirt in many folds and bags, firm and tight at the waist above which the same gray or black goods fluffed out again, till at the neck it ran into lace and pointed straight at the lobes of her ears; undoubtedly it was her wedding dress, and it was a good one. Her hair was long and the color of wheatstraw in winter, a kind of faded mouse; her face was narrow and olive-brown, the chin falling back quickly: the gray eyes were little and buried, the ears were flat and

in against the head, the teeth very sharp. She was quite plainly Hoosier, as was every soul at the dance, except myself and Bill Mack.

She and Ike simply hoed 'er down. No girl in the place could do the changes with half so blithe a foot as Em's. It is true that she was swung off her feet once or twice, but only because she was willing, and even then she knew every turn and stepped right ahead for the hand-a-man-left or first-couple-out. Ike let her go now and then for a moment, and she unfolded like a kite taking the wind. She sailed out to the corners of the room, dancing all the time and appearing to be free of Ike and to be dancing on her own account, but she was Ike's and he pulled her back as if she was a ball attached to a rubber band. She was ready to show off, yet in any case she was such a dancer that without trying she would have dazzled the laziest eye.

And at that, Ike was a better dancer! He was modest, he stayed close in and seemed to keep dancing in the same spot. That was because he could dance a great deal in a small space. He attended to things, to the music, to the range he had, to his partner and the other couples, and above all to his steps and the dance. He was not out to be seen, but danced for the inner relish of it. Once or twice he sped, just for an instant; and the most catchy of all turns at that event was Ike's sashaying, the little jigs and trots, the curly-cues that he put in at the corners, not as an odd feature but as a vital part of the dance. It might be claimed, if a person was looking for exceptions, that in his earnestness Ike leaned forward just a little too much.

The fiddler was Blind Bob, a man at whom I wondered though Joe and the Dippolds had told me of him. There he was, an underfed, lone-looking man in a big lumpy suit, his baggy frame propped half against the wall and half against the floor as he fiddled and called. "First couple out to the couple on the right! . . . Four hands up, and four hands round! . . . Had a man-Joe, and had a man-Jack! . . . Lady round the lady and the gent so-lo, Lady round the gent and the gent don't go! . . . Four-and-six!"

The fiddler would call too fast or too slow, and the boys would shout: "Slow 'er down, Bob, you're getting ahead," and again, "A little life, Bob, or Ike will freeze in his felts." Most of the signals meant little more than, "Fall to!" But green dancers would stall on the four-and-six, and Em liked to start them again: "No, right through here. There you go!"

People in our neighborhood think they are smarter and can dance better than those in the Ike and Em country. But that is to be proved, and some of us think highly of the dancing of Ike and Em.

Not long ago I saw and heard a dance in the town, among our own people, not Hoosiers this time but the Irish. Some of the dancing was rough and some of it wooden, but it was lighthearted and simple; it was as if all the people took hands and made up one big game or party.

First I went to an old neighbor's wake, and when the beads had been said the second time I came home, and the dance was going. It was in the same old place where they always danced: above the hardware store, over against the railroad track. That is the K o' C hall where they play cards and hold the elections and have had wakes and weddings and banquets; but now the new hall is quite the style.

A man who once was young and lean stood at the door. He said they were hard-time dances: boys twenty cents, girls ten. "It all goes to the cemetery fund; the music's free—that's the same old Gab Lamar fiddlin' away. Everybody comes."

We had made out the change or call while we were yet down in the road; it was the Grapevine Twist. Not glib "lady-round-the-lady," and not a simple "balance-all" or a wild "chase-the-rabbit." The Grapevine is a country game, more a trial of strength than of speed or skill. Perhaps it could be mild if the dancers were, or if the fiddler and the one who calls off did not put a whip into it. That night it was led by a big handsome man who dragged

quieter people after him, his coat hardly able to stay with him. He was like two Russians or like an overfed fullback driving at the line. And I had been told half a dozen times that this horse of a man had been in a wreck the night before, two boys had been nearly killed, and he had bounced away unscratched. In the dance he moved with the power of a motor, and boys and girls were swung and twisted back and forth through "the vine."

All the boys had good shoes. Some wore finger-rings—something that would never have been seen beyond twenty years ago. Some wore overalls, one a sweater. A stooped boy in overalls, the bib outside his sweater, said: "You don't know me?" Then it was easy enough: he was a great grandson of Mary Ann's. Long lank goblers strode in the dance, never having time to straighten their knees, their lower legs following after them and bending around the corners. More dapper ones pranced, one little blob of a man looking up at his partner. A mother in high shoes enjoyed herself, her thin gray hair boosted up on top of her head, and her daughter, a clumpy big person, danced in the same set. A flatfaced girl, her look as lifeless as skim milk, was pushed in and out, and was glad when the dance was over.

A dark girl, quite firmly built, and just too tall for short, was recognized as the best dancer. She had black curly hair, eyes almost black, the feet small, the arms too long, the hands large; but she used hands and arms well in managing burly partners. Her pick-up was her own, and gave no hint of jerkiness. She danced, but she could ease back with a kind of solemn dignity and let others dance. It was evident that she knew she could dance; she took to it, yet she did not regard herself as the only person in the hall. Then at last I made her out: J. J.'s grand-niece, and her own father—as everybody knew—a Hoosier!

The music was mostly taken for granted. Sometimes boys and girls applauded it, and once it was praised. It wasn't just the fiddle but was of three or four pieces more or less assorted. It had to hit it up in the Grapevine, but in other

changes it settled down to a kind of old saw. Then at times it ran in circles, coming up with a leap or rollick, and turning lazy again. It took me several weeks to decide what it was like, the way it had of rising abruptly with a sort of squeak and then of sagging down. It was like the breathing of a worn wooden pump, and not unlike the outburst and refrain of a hawker. It went up, then forward and down in a kind of curve. I couldn't get the shape of it precisely, and can't get it to lilt for me now. It was a little bit as if the old dance hall had taken to dancing, as if it swayed and creaked and for a moment left the hardware store and then simply and as a matter of fact came back to its place.

At last I have made out what the hall and music and dancers were like. They were like a merry-go-round with music. Of course, there was swaying and creaking, a suddenness as of galloping, a clatter as of wooden shoes, a lightness and freedom as of children's voices.

But why the common return, just those times, to the quadrille? For a decade and a half the square dance had gone out. Why the return now? No boy seemed to know why, or to have known about the change.

The older men knew there had been reversion, and could give an account of it. One said: "I'll tell you what. They started the old dance again three or four years ago. The depression did it. That's when we started dancing again, me and my wife; that's one of our girls there in the green skirt; she's got two kids."

"Well, I'll tell you. Some of us old people wanted to dance, and we couldn't do their funny trots and slides, and wouldn't try. So they gave us a couple of changes, you know these here square dances. But we wanted more for our money. So we put on our own dances: Married People's Frolics. Then the kids couldn't pay their fancy fiddlers, and couldn't keep up with all this truckin' and the like. So we all went in together, and now we all dance the same thing. And I suppose it's just as good."

It is as good, and it really is better in the sense that all

the people can do it, and the dance in that way belongs to the neighborhood. Perhaps that is what a dance ought to be anyway, not a two-by-two affair, but a kind of picnic or social event. And it would be perfect if everybody could give to it something of the vim and ardor and finish and one might say the faith of Ike's and Em's dancing.

We Ask Ye All to the Wedding

IT WAS a tremendous occasion when one of the sisters of The Granger was at last getting married. This big family was compact and now one member was daring to push out; a match had been made. And not only the family but the farm was great and important. Was it not in its day like a small town?

Our family was invited. In part, that was because all the people in the neighborhood were invited, but it was also because of genuine friendliness: a wedding, most of all at that famous house, was for everybody. And what a friendly way they had to invite people—not by solemn letters printed by a machine, but by a personal messenger. One of the boys went on a horse from house to house. "We want ye to come to Annie's wedding a week from Tuesday, all of ye." But what else could come from that family except a hearty "come all ye"? Of course, people were looking for the invitation, and here it was—on horseback. The wedding would occupy the whole day, from ten or ten-thirty till midnight, and we knew it also included everyone in the neighborhood. Everybody now was rigging up the best team and springwagon, and everybody was buying gifts. At that house a wedding had to be early in the week; but a Monday might not be good luck.

It is easy to remember details of that event. It was in November, the twenty-second; we were to finish the last load of our husking before we went; and all of us little boys were keen huskers that day. No thought of school. And at the table; little boys saw for the first time butter served in tiny squares, and one boy took it in his hand for candy.

The wedding for Big Man's foster brother also was big;

our father and mother were invited to it, and we afterwards heard our mother and a neighbor woman talking about the excellence of the food. We need not say that when people were invited, they did not wait to be coaxed. A big wedding was in many ways the event of the season, smaller but more intimate and human than the picnic on the Fourth.

The first of the lean humanist's seven daughters to be married had a great wedding. It seems to us now that everyone in the parish was there. They were not rich people, but for several days in advance they had the neighborhood's two or three specially known cooks. At the dinner, a woman with a name for stinginess ate and ate; as the lean humanist said afterwards, she made out well. But toward the end she had to slow up, and she confessed on a kind of a wail: "If I knew there was so much pie and so much cake, I wouldn't have eat so much soup and so much meat." The only Scot family in the neighborhood was there, and the man and woman sang together and in turns. Once the Scot couldn't get through a song about a duck; then she forgot her words in a lengthy song, and he chided her, but got this retort: "As bad as you in *The Duck!*" All night they danced, in the barn. Gab was the only fiddler in those days, and his son, surely not over ten, played the mandolin. I watched and watched the boy, my own age, and at last asked whether I might play for one set, and though I had never touched a mandolin in my life I was allowed.

A few years ago I was invited to our Uncle Tom's for the wedding of one of the girls and a neighbor boy. It was my hard luck that I couldn't go, because it was sure to be a wedding of the homelike sort with all the neighbors present, Big Man of course walking across the fields life-size to it.

With the exception of one or two, I was the first to know there was going to be a wedding. The girl had told me a year earlier; and probably one day at least before she told the boy for certain and very sure; but if he was a sharp

boy at all, he knew. She didn't tell me; she asked me: "Do you think I ought to? Because, well, you know. Do you think it would be all right—the thing for me to do?" She said these words, she whispered them in the most hidden and secret way, and she meant to ask; but we may be fairly sure that though she did not know it, this was her way of telling me that she was going to be married.

Did she want to get married, and to this boy, and did she know any reason why she should not?

The moment was as secret as could be: late at night and the boy gone home, the girl had crept like a mouse, seated herself on the floor, and scarcely whispered.

She knew no ruse in the world, no tricks or camouflage. So she answered the little questions. "Yes, I think I do want to. . . . No, no reason. . . . Now, don't tell anyone, not even Mother; because we haven't quite made up our minds yet." But we may guess that the mother had her ear, this long while, pretty close to the ground.

Some one who knew had told me that for a couple of months before the event, they had just one thing to do at Uncle Tom's, just one central concern. They had been getting ready for the wedding. It was in the spring, and though the new pigs, the clucking hens, and the drilling in of the oats were not neglected, all of these had to take a second place.

The house-keeping here has always been a model for neatness and dispatch; not one little cobweb has ever rested half a day in any upper corner of any upstairs room. The furnishing is farm-style and spare, in fact lean: a radio now, a flat little kitchen stove, as old as the house, a kitchen table that serves a dozen purposes, chairs slicked with use, and parlor chairs well made by one of the boys out of walnut pig-troughs. Even every physical thing is in the open and aboveboard. And not only the house is trim and right, but the cave (where the mother put aside the best gooseberries and blackberries and cherries as she canned and jelled last summer), and the smoke-house, the yard, the garden and orchard. And now for this occasion, things

were almost worn through with polishing, for it was a wedding and the first wedding at home.

Afterwards, the paper—reduced by this time to a page in the county paper—said: “One of the prettiest weddings of the season . . . to the strains of Mendelssohn’s wedding march played by the cousin of the bride . . . beautifully attired . . . and carried an arm bouquet of pink Briardale roses . . . a bounteous 3-course dinner at the home of the bride’s parents. . . . The bride was one of Monroe County’s most successful teachers. The groom has been a farmer for several years, and has a home already furnished. . . . The best wishes of their many friends accompany them.”

It is a great thing, getting ready for a wedding, or even for a threshing, or to receive people home if they have been in Chicago for a few years. Our own mother used to say, when there was a big preparation for anything, “I think it’s all in the getting ready.” The lean humanist also said that kind of thing at least once; it was when a daughter who had married away, at length came back alone for a visit. The old gent inquired, “Where’s the man?” And when told that the man had stayed at his work in New York, he said, “Ah, I think it’s a paper man.”

Here at this house they knew what they had been doing. The man had for a good while been in sight. And it was perfectly clear in the mother’s mind, all along now, just what was to be done, as if she had all her life been a match-maker, or herself been through the marriage mill many times. And the girl was smart and knew how to provide. In fact she had said in a letter: “He has a house with a few things in it. And we went to another town,¹ two weeks ago and bought just a couple of things more. That’s all we can afford now (the way the times are, you know). But we’ll find a place for you when you come.” She had sent back a month earlier a copy of the *Imitation of Christ* which she thought much of, and had said: “I remember that I only borrowed this,” as if anyone would not want her to keep it. And people told me the next summer that

¹ Unwilling to be seen preparing for the event.

she had been busy packing at home; a little box and a trunk had been nearly filled, bit by bit, for months, and all the time she knew where each thing was.

Well, the day came, much more quickly than anyone would think, and they were coming down already from the church. Most people get married only once in a lifetime; it's everything to look forward to and something to look back to, but it takes only a minute. Boy loves girl and is loved by girl. The priest says: "Michael, will you take Joan here present for your lawful wife?" And evidently he will, and she will take him, as in fact for months they have made up their minds and hearts to this.

These people and all our people get married in the church. Where else would they get married? It is true that once a couple happened to use a hunting license to get married in a neighboring church, a matter soon rectified. But to be married in a house or a shop or an office—that would be unthinkable; it would be like a Hoosier marriage, and our neighborhood would think it a strange and half-hearted way to start a new life. After all, it was only an omathan, hardly ever mentioned in our neighborhood, that got married and got divorced; and he had to leave the community. And though the Lord knows that we hear enough, even in our country place, about divorce, we don't believe in it and don't ever resort to it. The neighborhood is one, each family is decidedly one, and when boy says he will take girl and girl says she will take boy, through thick and thin, till death does in some ordinary sense part them, they mean exactly what they say. At our Confirmation, the Bishop asked a fat little girl whether marriage was like a horse trade: whether the parties might revoke the trade when they pleased. The girl was not good in catechism, but she could answer that question.

Another wedding came, and I was invited and particularly unhappy to have to miss it. For it was a golden wedding, and it was the same month and year our parents would have celebrated their jubilee.

Often I have gone to visit these people. Their place is

just outside Tick Ridge, but not half way to J. J.'s, and it is so much home to the ten children and their many families that they hardly get a chance to build up homes of their own. The man is in many ways the head of the house, a tall stooped man and big-bodied. He hasn't slowed up a lot, and doesn't drag his heels. What he is famous for is calmness and sanity of judgment; he cannot be rushed or worried into anything, and even the priest has—they say—taken counsel of him. The Stump Man, when he was on the bottom land, and again (on the other side) on the farm he brought out of the brush, has long been a neighbor of his. And it was the Stump Man who told several of us the following story.

The cool man had a brother come storming to him. "What do you think now?" said the brother. The cool man had often told this brother to give the boys more rope. "More rope, you'll say!" shouted the brother. "But do you know what they actually want now—a Ford!"

"Well," said the cool man, "I'd get them a Ford. That's what I'd do."

His own ten, the six big boys and the four big girls, got along a good while without any Ford, and now a good while only with Fords. They are strong and bulky people, farmers—corn-and-hog farmers; and a person might look for them to be as uncultivated as stubble, but they are always gentle and mannerly. At that, there is hardly in our three parishes a family of their generation that will outdo them for sheer tonnage.

The father keeps calm. He has humor and sense and patience. His talk is never silly optimism, and yet never disconsolate. It is true that times are not what they've been, but they'll pick up. Just wait, sit tight, keep your eyes open. Things look bad at first, but time is a good doctor and heals a lot of deep cuts. No need to get fussy or panicky. The man with faith in man and God can wear out most of his troubles.

That is the manner of this farmer. He is a poet, too, as all men of that sort are if they just happen to put their

thoughts into words. The subjects he writes about are well known to him: silos, chickens, and children, the whole family, and God. As it ought to be and inevitably would be, the verse is direct, done always in the form of letters to the mother and the children. Here is some of it. Lines "made up and wrote down by your own loving Dad" tell of gifts "that money cannot buy," and at the same time they make a list of all good things: wealth is a good but less good than health, which is a rugged frame from the family tree; and a normal mind is even yet better, the mother herself is a chief blessing, and the greatest gift of all is Faith. At Christmas he writes to two of the boys who won't be able to "get your feet under Mother's table":

"We'll miss you when the gang rounds in
But hope we'll soon be together again,"

and in the last line he signs the letter-verse, "per J. P. J." On Mother's Day 1936 he writes to all the children "A Tribute to Mother," who wasn't a scold. And when the mother was once absent he wrote to "Dear Ma" that the fire wouldn't burn, the dish-cloth was lost, the house "nearly out of groceries," and all wires were crossed:

"The hens don't seem to cackle,
The sickle it don't seem to cut."

The cause of this general calamity is that

"Bees won't make no honey
If you take away the queen."

So the mother is requested to be on the job the week "the silo's filled."

Wise as the father is, perhaps he is mainly the spokesman for one wiser than himself. The mother is quiet and unassuming, the simplest kind of person. Her hair has got thin and gray, but is not white. Busy these fifty years with many things, she has nevertheless found time for thought and prayer. And she is not too serious, but can joke and smile.

She and the daughters were born plain, and don't know much about makeup. Their look and manners are themselves. No freaks or oddities in them or their kitchens, no curls or frills.

One day when I sat in the yard with all of them, the mother asked me to come into the house for supper. I said the delay would make me late for the train. Then she went into the kitchen and in a few minutes she and the girls came out carrying a table with supper on it. They seemed to have in their minds, "This is one on you. You wouldn't come to our table, so we have brought the table to you," and their manner was as frank and unaffected as their little trick. One might say that everything they had and everything they were, was spread out before us there on the hill.

Then the mother asked me to come into the kitchen to bless what she called the children; really, the grandchildren. I did not ask why only these and why in the kitchen, and not in the yard. But people's houses and especially the kitchens are sacred places, like chapels, and people are blest in their children. One child was asleep upstairs, sprawled on a bed, and a girl nearly the size of Big Man led the way to him, to have him blest.

The big man of this family who took me to the train told me with great earnestness how kind I was 'to visit his people, as if kindness does not work both ways! What he likes best is to have people tell him how perfect his mother is. "That's so. . . . You' darn right! . . . You know, the hardest thing I find, generally, is making a living: you know, we got a good little crowd, ourselves, Dot and I; but it aint so hard when I see Ma—I mean not so hard to be short on things. Do you know what she says? She says, 'Look at Mike Gavin up the road here; he's never had anything, land or money, or was sure of work or a place to stay.' You know that yourself, don't you, for a fact! And, she says, 'He's brought up his family there: you might say he's gone through life lying down and crawling; and now he comes out on the other side standing up; he's got that family raised!' an' by gosh, he has!"

The moral seemed to be that here was a man who all his life had nothing, who traded perpetually on that, and yet did well. A prudent man if careful, the mother would say, could get along on very little, but if a man was wise he could make his way emptyhanded.

Well, J. P. J. and wife were a good while getting ready for the golden day. To celebrate was to bring not only the people—the family and neighborhood—but all that time and its events close together again. And as usual the mother was the head of the house. One of the girls wrote me an invitation and added: ". . . We are all agreed of course on beginning the day with Mass, but as to the extent of the celebration for the rest of the day 'tis a matter of much discussion among the ten of us. . . . How to accommodate so many at home in cold weather! And while some of the gang favors going to the hall, Mother prefers to be at home."

That is undoubtedly a habit of hers.

CHAPTER IV

Clouds and Winds Without Water

OLD men rarely agree on anything, and Irishmen, old and young, are known to be contrary. But our people are agreed that the driest summer we ever had was that of 1934.

In the spring, just when we expect barrels of rain, it was exceptionally dry; it did not rain more than a fair shower in all of June and July, and it was the last night of August before a genuine rain fell. So we need not argue about it; we have not a case on record—and we have the record of this—to compare with it.

I was with friends in the country when the rain at last began to fall. People and crops had much the same browned and burnt look, and if crops could be sad they would have felt like the people. At first, we got a little patter of drops; but people were so used now to the pain of drought that they could not immediately ease away from it; besides, their faith in rain had been somewhat cooked out of them. Soon one might say there was the clatter of rain, and in ten minutes we began to get a steady downpour. Then the people remembered. Rain was like some old lovely thing, half lost and forgotten but now promising to be recovered.

The head of the family spoke. "Let's say the rosary," was all he said. They knelt down then around the kitchen table, where they were, everyone at his chair.

It was not a new thing in that house to say the rosary. They had said it all their lives, and all that summer they had prayed for the rain that did not come, and after more hope and prayer yet did not come. And the rain that came now could not rescue any crop. As for potatoes and corn and hay, people had no hope in that line now. And the

land with or without rain was all one—it was a meatless bone.

“God!” people say in droughts. “Send rain! Hail Mary, full of grace . . . pray for us sinners. . . . Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. . . . Give us this day our daily bread.”

Faith and hope and great human patience, and no rain comes.

That is what we don’t like, wheat and corn and pastures burning up, in the oven before their time, with the look of October before the middle of July. At this rate, heaven knows how we will live next winter. What is to pay the rent, or the eternal taxes? Who in the world could help us at the grocery store?

Maybe the hot winds set in. That takes the life out of man and corn. A man can enjoy a sharp wind in the proper season, a wind that cuts into his face. Once I came home at night on a horse through a snowstorm, and though it was a fast day in Lent my mother made me eat hot mince pie; for I was, as we say, just “harished” with the cold: harished means frozen and famished. But blizzards won’t hurt any crop, and men can still find a bite to eat. It is the hot southwest wind that saps man and fowl and horse and every crop. The wheat withers under it, the straw turns brittle, the grain chaffy. The corn, beginning to shoot, turns back, and crinkles. It twists and we might say it writhes in pain. Instead of spreading out in the morning, the leaves curl up; by noon the field is like a stove, giving off waves of heat, and by three o’clock they are rolled up as tightly as a stalk. No life now, no promise of growth; nature can only try to protect itself. There is a man’s corn—his crop, his hope, his way of paying, the good of his life—cooking before his eyes.

Not much to be done now. A man can only go out—if he has the heart even to do this—and run his cornplow up and down, or drag a mower wheel between the rows. By that act, we will help to conserve any moisture there is in

the ground. That will help, on one condition: that the rain is not uselessly far off.

But it is the dry year, the worst ever. A dirge begins to go up from all the people. Often we have heard it. "The corn crinkling in the drought. . . . That new seeding, I bet, burnt almost crisp. . . . And the apples full of worms, and no potatoes again this year. . . . A bit of cloud in the west last night—ah, yes, but it was half-hearted and not a drop in it. Clouds every night, and winds without water. A dry moon, in its last quarter. Well, it's been a scald. Everything parched, withering away. Dogs and men and chickens and pastures, everything with its tongue out. Thank God, there's a new moon tonight. Look and see which way it's tilted: would it hold water, or spill it?"

One day of a dry year I came to my mother and said there was a ripe little pumpkin in the west field. "Ah," she said, "I'm afraid it ripened from weariness!"

The whole land and people are worn down. Then at last a bit of relief. Rain falls. They see it coming, and they believe. "What, a real rain? It's gathering in the west! God of heaven, I hope it pours. Didn't we see whitecaps enough all summer, and heat lightning? . . . There it is now, the rain. Look at the first big drops chasing a little cloud of dust along in front of them as they strike. My, look at it now! Big drops, sheets of rain, a downpour. Chips and straws floating in the yard."

That is what people do. They pray and hope for rain, they thank heaven for it. That is what my friends in the country did in 1934. Hardly anyone is defeated by a drought. The next day after that rain it was a new month, and the least bit like a new life. The gray land had drunk all the water, and was not refreshed; there was no mud. Even before the sun rose, the smell of earth and grass was like the smell made by throwing water on a hot stove: the smell of scorch and sizzle. But rain had come, and men said it would help. Wheat, potatoes, corn, everything was gone up the flue; gardens would have to be patient and wait a year. It would help the grass, though; most of the

burnt pasture would revive. So men said. After all, they had faith in land and crops, even if a woman had written and said that "the pasture is like a desert."

Dust was seen in April. That is always a good sign. It was dry in mid-May, and everyone was thankful: that is the season to plant corn. After that, rain was needed. People had rated the year before as dry, but it couldn't hold a candle to this.

All the sure signs failed. The rain-crows were heard night after night, and no rain fell. Ordinarily we get eight or nine inches during the three months and a half in which the corn is made; a fat little man keeps the record, and we know we got much less than one inch this year. That was drought. People prayed week in and week out. On Sunday they all prayed together in the church after the last Mass: ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys. Still, no rain fell. It used to be that when we prayed, we got results; at least, we sometimes did; and one man, with a spotted face and thin yellowish wool on the back of his head, was so sure we always got the rain that he would not take a chance; as soon as we'd finish the prayers, he'd run for his horse and get started home. "Better get home," he'd say. "Ye're sure to be caught in a pourdown!"

Prayers and signs both failed. One man refused to pray, at home or at church. He is a good man, a breeder of Shorthorns, but a lonely man, saddened especially by the loss of a son in the War. When he was told now that people at church were praying for rain, he said: "What we need is a good rain." Other men prayed, and got no rain, but took the matter less heavily. It was that summer that the Stump Man who had dug into two hills looking for water, said: "No rain in sight yet. If it don't rain soon, we'll have to tell Franklin D., and see if he can't do something about it." Fun or no fun, all signs did fail. A big uneven man of a lumpy look said that "the crows ganged and cawed like cattle bellowing," and still no rain came. He said that had been a sure sign. Another said there had been dewless mornings, and evenings when the sun set in a cloud. These

signs brought nothing, and he said, "What we need is a new set of rules."

Two additional trials came with the drought and because of it. Dust storms till then had only been talked of: at least, we never had seen a bad one. Now a dust storm came out of the west; it was the color of chocolate or darker: a good deal like the smudge that rises from old trash burning. It left a scum, and hurt the eyes and throat. But people and things lived through it; really, nothing was hurt.

The chinch bugs were the pest. They took acres and fields of the corn as it showed above ground. They took some fields outright, and thinned others to less than half a stand. Rain would stop them, but the rain did not come. Around some fields, the men poured furrows of costly oil; that stopped the crawlers, but not the fliers, and it is hard for a man to tell at which stage the bug will be when he arrives. Once he comes in hordes inside the field, there is nothing that can be done.

Secretary Wallace provided soybean seed at a fixed price, to replace the corn. Men could pay in cash, then or later, or could pay in work on the roads, grading and ditching and shaling. But it was too dry for the beans, unless they were planted deep so as to tap the moisture. Some men pushed the beans down six or eight inches, and one man said he used the corn-planter, straddling the corn rows, and "rode the runners," and his beans sprouted quickly and made a good crop. The soybean thrives on almost no rain, and the bean can be sold and the fodder fed to all kinds of stock.

The sharp-nosed Irishman, rated by some as the best neighbor, told us he had never seen such a drought. "I seen lots of dry years," he said, "but this is the worst. By far! In 1893,¹ it was bad, but not like this. And '89 was not a good year for anything. The worst I ever saw before was '79. I was working for a man named Ryan up along the Skunk River, and it never rained you might say at all, so

¹ The dates as I recall them; he did not hesitate.

that crops were burnt and water was scarce; but this year beat that. And in '76 and '77 in Kansas—I was not there, but a railroader told me—the grasshoppers were as big as a man's hand and plenty as the chinch bugs; they ate everything there was, stripped any trees they had in that country, and never left a blade of grass nor a stalk of corn they didn't eat; and then they bored through the walls of the houses and ate the tables and the people's clothes. I seen it here once or twice the corn didn't come up except it was planted as deep as a furrow, but them years we had small grain and some show of pasture and hay." No wonder this neighbor often says, "A good rain never comes amiss in this country." (He is one of the two yet living in the neighborhood who were born abroad, and he recalls that good rains often come amiss in Ireland.)

It was easy to count up what the people had to get them through the winter. By some freak of local showers, two or three had corn that would go ten bushel an acre, a fourth of a crop. Oats in actual cases did not return the seed; almost every garden thing was hopelessly baked. One family had four bushels of late tomatoes which would dill, but did not have time to ripen. Another had a good patch of cane, which was a neighborhood wonder since cane is sweet and tastes good to bugs; it had legions of inactive bugs on it near the foot of the stalk, and these would have to be washed off, stalk by stalk, if the molasses were to be fit to eat. Wild plums were small, but of good quality, and the wild grapes were good though few. I asked a man whether people couldn't revert to crab-apple butter. "No," he said, "we don't know how to make it anymore, but I know it takes sugar and we couldn't get that."

In a level field on one of the best farms a man and his wife were cutting corn. They used the old hand-blades, and the cutting of corn in a common year, however it is done, is hard work; this year it was merely wearisome. The man said, "Look: you can't cut this corn; you can only hack it off." That was true, for the corn was unhealthy, without sap or life. He showed us the layers of smooth, shiny gray

bugs against each stalk near the foot and again at the roots: no wonder the corn was lifeless.

Well, the rain did come, and I went with a farmer the next morning into the field in an iron-wheeled wagon to haul fodder to the lean cows and horses. When we had thrown off the fodder, the wagon-box was alive with gray bugs, little fellows with no love for moisture, things with the ugly smell of bedbugs but with sleek little bodies the color and shape of a dove's; they are lovely to look at as they flit along a damp board in the September sun.

"We haven't anything," that man's mother said: "just a few little white onions."

And how sadly people say such things! They seem to be far off and helpless, as if inclosed by a tight iron fence.

What they raised in 1934 was like chaff. But hope is not easily beaten in a farmer's breast. I record their own words. Mary Jane said that she did not see how, this of all years, they could live through: "but we will, with the help of God." Mart, the other one of that famous pair, was at work with men on the Bluegrass Road; as some one said, they were "working out their beans." When a young man said he wouldn't work to pay for beans that never sprouted, Mart got sore and said: "Don't you see that sign down there? It means just what it says: 'Men at work'!" Another, his little job in the town lost and a big family on his hands, was offered relief, but said, "We won't take it till we have to." He has never accepted relief.

In those days I saw our old friend Muck come into the town on a white razor of a horse, bareback. He was chewing as usual and was stooped and strong. He made this brief report: "People prayed up at the church for rain. If the Lord'd wanted it to rain, it'd a-rained; the Lord didn't want it to rain." I suggested that it was a good deal to have good neighbors, rain or shine, and he said: "I ain't got a word of complaint against God or man. We came here thirty years ago not knowing a soul, and we always was treated square ever since, and we've got lots of friends. We

wouldn't move away from here, not if you gave us a farm anywhere else."

Three weeks after the first rain fell, I got a letter from a neighbor, the father of one of the biggest families. It had been raining all the day he wrote. It was he who had the crop of cane, and he said he must get into it the next day, himself and his crowd of boys. Two days later he completed the letter: "It did clear up that day and I went at the cane. We dug spuds the next day; they were not much of a crop but had to be done. It rained today again, all day, and is clearing and cool tonight."

Two months later he got to the end of another letter. "We have had fine rains and lots of heat all fall, so the grass looks lots different from the time you were here. It's been a grand fall for plowing and sowing wheat. The markets on some farm stuff is pretty good now but on some more not so good. Of course grain and hay are high. Horses are a good price and sheep are selling good, but hogs, especially pigs, are rotten; people don't want to have to winter them on high-priced corn, not knowing what the market will be next summer. Most everybody around here has reduced their stuff about the limit."

During the dry spell, this man had written: "I've been awful busy and hope to still be busy for another while cutting corn. I don't mean corn, I just mean fodder; we don't have any corn as you know. We haven't had any rain since spring, so you know the rest. The water is getting to be a serious question in this part. Feed is going to be a proposition this winter for both man and beast. Every dollar looks as big as a house now and I suppose a year from now will look bigger still. But nevertheless we are still eating three meals a day and thank the Lord we are all well. I'm writing in the field on a ball of twine."

What one would not easily know is how the people lived through that winter which was fairly severe, but not anything to match the following winter. I have just a couple of letters, one written by a woman on Christmas night, 1934. "Another old-time blizzard on again tonight. Doubt-

ful if I can mail this tomorrow." The next day the snow continued. "The snow is slackening up some," she said then; "but, oh boy, does it ever seem like winter this year. It's about like the blizzard we had about four weeks ago."

This is the only index I have of the weather that winter at the end of the drought. But Louis of the three tall lean brothers wrote and said they were having a box-supper—a hint that people in The Rookery had to celebrate simply and to keep close to home. These are his words: "A nice Program. They raffled some things, and they had a guessing contest on a jar of peanuts. Whoever guessed the closest got it; there were 744 in it. Mr. Gales sold the boxes. He is an awful funny fellow and he sung some Scotch songs for us. He talks broken and every little bit he would give an awful hearty laugh. We sure had lots of fun."

CHAPTER V

Tiny Alligator of a City

THEY always say that man lives with man because he has to; and the word they use is "need." Man needs man, and has to have him; if he hasn't got him, he must go looking for him. He needs him in order to live at all: to eat, to learn, and so on. But he needs him also for love. And this has two senses closely related. He needs man to love, and he needs man to be loved by; he needs to give and to get love; by an inner demand he has to have love in these two ways, giving and getting. He would starve and does starve without loving and being loved. So he is forced in the matter. Yet love would not be itself if it were not free.

Since the hard times, our poor little town and neighborhood has suffered. The place is like an orphan. But the town is still there, a kind of iron center of things that cannot be washed away. A grim little place, hoping for and half believing in good times that must come again. In the normal times of twenty years ago the Stump Man, always ready for nonsense, wrote on the far side of his barn, high up, in chalk and in tremendous letters, "HARD HIT STOCK FARM," and indicated that his wife was the proprietor (the "prop."). She wondered who in the world did this, and he pretended to wonder, too. Well, the towns are like that, and our neighborhood is like that. Who left them so hard hit? Trucked out, tractored out, and blown out—they say that has been the fate in some regions; for example, in parts of Oklahoma. But our town, wretched and bled in a thousand ways, still is geographically where it was, and still has faith in itself.

All the time in these pages we have been with farm persons, The Granger, the lean humanist, Muck, and many friends and neighbors. We have had a hand of euchre with

them and husked and danced with them, gone to their weddings, and gone alive through droughts with them. Now we come to the town.

This is the physical center and also a social center. People go through and around our town now on their way to trade in bigger towns. Still, in spite of everything, some bit of trading occurs at home. The church is here, and is busy as always, the new hall is here, too, and they dance in it and play good basketball in it. Even the town pump, though it is not the vital center it was, has a few callers every day in the year, and because of its location it has come to divide the thin line of traffic.

The town has not the function it once had, not the whole function. The stores have been riddled and devastated by the coming of the car, and by the chain store, and this in our section means Montgomery Ward. Long ago we had a store of cheap odds and ends; we called this The Racket. For a long time we had two hardware stores, but we are left with the ghost of one. The saloon came and went half a dozen times; just yesterday an old man told me that once in the 'eighties the town had thirteen saloons; now we have two cafés. We had one bank, and to put a dollar "in the bank" was to have it high and dry; then we had a new and supposedly wildcat bank; now we have only a memory of too much credit.

As we record these items, we have a recurrent question. What has kept and yet keeps our poor little neighborhood so well together? Not riches or dough which we never had, nor the pursuit of riches which never unites many men firmly or long; nor learning and science, which of course we may not claim. It must really be the love of the people for each other, within the family and the community.

For years the people were always coming together, in the family, in the little handfuls called neighborhoods, and in the total parish. They went into the town especially on Sundays and on holy days; that was a point taken for granted, because the people were Irish and Catholic; it was as ordinary and as expected as getting up in the morn-

ing or going to bed at night. Any of us could at once name the two or three men who didn't go to church on Sunday, and a new young priest has lately gone from fields to barnyards and even to the cafés to round these few up. "He's got us all lined up," the people say.

If times are busy, some from each farm family will always hurry to the first Mass and then go home and run the binder while others go to the second: we have an eight and a ten o'clock. It is not right to miss Mass on Sundays and holy days. We all know the law; we are bound to go; it's an obligation; the priest says we are bound under pain of mortal sin.

But, good heavens! We wouldn't want to miss. It is not merely that we want to avoid anything wrong, but that we want to do right. Besides, we want to see and talk to all the neighbors.

Even so, we are Irish after all, and we know that it is right—in the sense of not wrong—to play ball on Sundays, and some of the old, old men, such as the humanist's brother-in-law, a tiny old man, have a good crop of broken fingers from the barehanded baseball of the 'eighties. We used to have horse races, too; once a girl born in Ireland rode one of the horses; and it doesn't seem long since crowds went one Sunday to this side of town and the next to the other side to attend races in which Mary Ann's fourth or fifth son took first place on a work horse. The main thing was not that it was or was not Sunday, but that it was excitement and brought people together. And the trouble now, at least for the older people, is that the local sports have been in part changed and in part abandoned. A man with a long thin chin like a duck's bill and a face and forehead of spotted pink and whey color, complained a year or two ago that nothing happens at home anymore. "It used to be we'd get up a nine on Tick Ridge every season and have a horse race or two in the summer."

Some people have felt that they have had to work on some Sundays. But there have always been counter opinions. "There's always a time to get your work done and

your crops in," an old man keeps repeating, his head to one side, his bronzed jaw pushed forward. "The Lord gives us the time," he says, "if ourselves'll only use it." Another neighbor, a bent bit of scrap-iron, would not do any work on Sunday, and what was not cleaned up on Saturday had to wait over till Monday morning. A younger red-faced man and his squat wife have said, with a final tone: "It don't pay to work on Sunday." They tried it and it always went against them. They set hens on Sunday, man and woman working together at so innocent an occupation, and they did not raise one chicken. After going to Mass, they cut oats one Sunday, and it rotted in the shock. They "bought pigs cheap" on Sunday and fixed a place for them; and the cholera took every one. The week is made for work, all week, day and night; but Sunday is for going to Mass and for visiting friends and neighbors.

People have expressed it in this way: "If we were to take to working on Sundays, first thing you'd know we'd be like them little bred-out Hoosiers over south and up west." (East of us is another Irish parish, and north is the third.)

And here is the town, a tiny alligator of a city lying at the foot of a hill, its dirty stubs of toes dug into the railroad track, its back stuck up, on North Hill, into a crooked little hump, its eyes sometimes filmy, its head pushed over into the thinned-out woods to the west. It used to be two towns, with two post-offices; but that was a silly arrangement.

The Cedar, into which the Bee Branch goes on its way to the Des Moines and the Mississippi, runs past the town, but on the far side of the track. Sometimes, when it keeps raining through March and April, the creek gets out of its banks, the trains creep along afraid to take another step, and the main front of the town is a backwater pond. Once I saw the bridge rocking like a boat. Some one said then that the town was just a hole in the ground. "Yes," said a man mired on First Street, "an' a damn dirty hole!"

The streets are two roads, one from the north and one from the south, crossing or nearly crossing, and then going on or coming back, whichever way a person wants to look

at it, as the south road and the west road. They form a "T" at the town pump, but two roads run off the top of this giving us First and Main. The north road itself, as it winds like water into the town, is called a street, Elm or North Elm. When we had a newspaper, it was quite a point to have names for streets and roads; but there is no need of it now. South across the bridge a little road of a bootleg look turns east, but runs out before it reaches the first hill. We are only a mile off "34," and the north road and North Elm, forming a spur into town, were hardsurfaced a few years ago; the other roads have been intermittently gravelled or shaled.

Looked at from the tall hill of pasture to the southeast, most of the town appears in a good summer as a gorgeous park with a few shacks and houses for tourists and keepers. In one way or another, most of the inhabitants are farmers, men who had retired in good times but run back and forth these years to the farm; they have to do this, to hold the land. Some take up a little business, such as a gas station, or they carry the mail; but hardly anyone has hand and mind entirely off the farm. Three or four families live by working on the section. Each family has a garden, and is likely to keep a cow and chickens or even a few shoats. The best pork I have ever eaten in America is raised by a townsman here, and handcured by him; in the winter he also fattens his own capons in the cellar, next to the furnace, and never has to go looking for what would make a Sunday dinner. One of the two native Irishmen left with us—the other, as was said, is John Nolan—raises in the town itself the best early potatoes in the neighborhood, and sells them to farmers. One old, old man has done every local job; he has been a farmer, of course, and an insurance agent, a teacher, the undertaker, the notary public, and has been a strong campaigner for the Democrats; he has been a grocer now for some years and has worked lately on some kind of stop signal for cars.

In the center of the town is the church. It is in the very center from east to west and not far from the center from

north to south, though there is hardly a south, since at one step a person is across the track and at another across the bridge and out of town. Even before the chain store and the car, the business places were a handful of wooden traps lying down around the pump.

The church is in yet other senses the center of the town and of the community. The bell can be heard all over the parish, and though it used to be rung only on Sunday mornings and for funerals it rings now at the Angelus, and most people, in town and country, bless themselves and pause to pray. A thin gray woman whose clothes match her body, for each is about to fall apart, stands, blesses herself, and at the words, "The Word was made flesh," makes a little crouch of an Irish bow, within the clothes to be sure but even more within herself. Her husband also says the Angelus, and bluntly remarks, "There's some of them here don't say it."

Everybody trades at the church. The inside may be the priest's, but the outside and especially the lawn, is the people's. There, except on wet and cold days, we have always chatted; we are at home there, the hillside is ours, and though the hill keeps one man standing over another we are on even terms. The old priest, located with us for a generation, was really not with or of us; he had good judgment on many things, yet was remote and intolerant in a dozen ways; now the people generally are happier, feeling that they are understood, and priest and people are more nearly on common ground.

The street is clay, and is hard to climb, most of all for old people and in bad weather. When people get up the hill, they turn and look across the butt end of the town. The view in every direction is grand: off south and southwest into hills of oak and corn, southeast down the track, west into the timbered part of town. Just beneath them the town is what we call riffraff: houses and stores caving in with the times; weeds, old fences and hitchracks that have had their day, and shacks that were a livery barn, then a sales barn, and now rotted lumber. Neighbors of ours

have a picture of this barn, taken in 1915, showing a horse and a horseshoe painted into the gable.

Near the foot of Elm and almost downtown, we used to have another church, the Methodist or Hoosier church. It was never much frequented in this century, and now it has fallen down and nothing unless weeds has grown up in its place. Only two or three of the early Hoosier families have remained; year by year they kept going off to Texas, Dakota, Chicago, or to small towns in Iowa: they have left this poor place to the Irish. At first, these people were the only people, then they were long in the majority, then there was a long time of strain between Irish and Hoosier, and at last the disappearance of one of them.

When a man of a Protestant or Hoosier family was dying a few years ago, the old priest was asked whether the choir might not be sent to the man's house to sing hymns. A Hoosier wake! And psalm-singing!

The choir went. Then another oldtimer died, and the priest was asked to send the choir to the Protestant church itself. To the Hoosier church, the M. E. church! No, it was sure that the members were not to go there and "participate in heresy." All the same, they went. One law might be clearly against it, but the law of charity and neighborliness was for it. The oldtimer was a neighbor and one of the first settlers; so the people were doing no scandalous thing, but taking part in a neighborly act. The old church, ready then to fall down, had no longer the tone or life of a church in it—an Irishman would say it never had; only the name was against it, and in fact it was no more sacred than the townhall and less so than a private home. We may be sure the people thought it quite right to go.

CHAPTER VI

Men Holding Up the Hills

A FEW years ago I came into the town under a sunshiny sky on the first day of June. I was looking out the window on our world. The station at Tyrone, used for nothing any more, whisked by. Now I knew the farms, the lie of them, their quality and even their names. The Stone place, the old Lahart place, the back eighty of the Sullivan place. Here corn was showing across the ridges, and the whole layout was like two camels following end to end.

A mile out of town was a farm I knew well. Its little spreading house, its stables and yard and garden are all built on a shelf of the narrow ridge that comes down to the track; back of the house, the hill goes straight up. The top and sides of this hill were in corn, and the foot of it, so late as this, was being worked into shape by two men; on the road toward the top of the hill, stood a woman in everyday clothes. That evening I sat with her and her family at supper, at which we had molasses, a little thin at this season and turned black, but yet molasses, and I told her that no one could have said from the train whether she was a woman or a scare-crow. "I suppose not," she said, "nor from much closer up!" She had left a baby in the house, and gone up the hill looking for the strayed two-year-old.

It came to me in those days that what has occurred on the land, say in the decade after 1922, might be put in a couple of sentences. The first was stated by a woman running a grocery store: "All our troubles," she said, "are money troubles." The other, visible to any one who goes among these people, is that the farmer, always a poor man and naked and out of luck long before what we call the

depression, has stood up with a wisdom and courage of his own.

The War and the post-war profits turned people's heads. The thing was to buy. Land was the thing, the price did not matter. A man of normal good sense has told us that though he bought his farm in boom times, he could have sold it at a ridiculous profit. And yet, one way or the other, this sale would have done him no good. He said, "Frances and I would have gone out the next morning and put the money into some other high-priced place." Or he says they would have stuck it, for safe-keeping, into the bank—and certainly have lost it. "Everybody knows the end of that story."

In fact, he had been advised, in his buying, by the most prudent people. A woman well known for sharpness and for looking things over, said to him: "You will never see Iowa land cheap again." A man who had always had judgment on land and cattle and banks, was brief and confident: "You can't go wrong on land."

Everybody plunged. To have land before other people got it, to get in before it was all gone—that was the scramble.

Then land went down, and everything went down, and people found out the insecurity of land and banks. It was a slump, then *the* slump. Then, with the farmer exhausted, the depression came.

Since those days of big talk, men have fled from the farms. Young men go looking for work, and whether they find it or not, they rarely come back. Thus the land loses its best, its youngest and strongest and most hopeful. A few come back, and no one any more thinks anything of the return.

Among the farmers the joke at first was that The Granger's brother had been refused credit and also that he wanted "to unload half a section or so of that corn land." But this kind of saying, if exaggeration in that man's case, was soon no joke. The hard times had come, had set in like a hard winter. Spring began to look far off. Then when

the poor little banks folded up, business was dead. As the lean humanist reported, "This place is dead as Hell. It would be a good place to start a hospital, it is so quiet. If you knock on any one's door, they will jump from fright."

People have to become timed to the low income. Of course, they don't complain of little cash, but that the little bit they have must be matched against the big taxes and interest. Mortgages, interest, taxes—these were always our bugbear; and when our wretched income falls to nearly nothing, these have a way of remaining at the earlier level. Men ask the holders of mortgages to revise the mortgages down—a process that is not loved and is seldom faced in time, though in a few cases the holder has made such revision and made it more than once on the same piece of land. Otherwise, the farmer, after a terrible ordeal of trying to keep the old place, himself goes down.

Even the dollar, when a man does get it, is a poorer thing now; it won't do what it once did. A farmer says, "It won't cover the spot as it would thirty years ago: the spot has widened."

Well, whatever a man did—unless he was an expert—his property got away from him. The Stump Man, who has kept his head well above water, has made the point in this way: "If you have money, you might as well give it to the first man you meet. For if you put it into land, the mortgage man and the taxes will eat you up; if you put it into the bank, the bank breaks; and if you hide it in the cellar, the gangsters will find it." All the same, he has never given away any lump sums of it.

He has another way also to express the times. "New men in office," he says; "that's what we want."

We know two things about this man: he is seldom more than mildly serious, and he always talks of politics as if it was somebody else's business: "they" say and "they" do or do not. So we ask him, "Which new men?"

"Any new men," he says, "just so they're new men. It doesn't matter who they are. All the men in office are going to be turned out and other men, better or worse, put in in

their place." This stump farmer has always been able to joke, to make out, to wear old rags and make them do, to lend money, to scrape together the leavings of his pocket and manage a smoke in his stump of a pipe.

Times have changed, but for him at least any time means a new chance for fun. And that is generally the way with our people; they stay bitter, or appear bitter, for only a moment; after all, they are Irish. A little young mother, her teeth falling out, said prices had been ruinously short for chickens and geese the fall before. But then she broke off and said, "Oh, well, maybe we'll have to pay to get the market to take them next fall!" A young man summed things up well, but was not bitter: "The harder you tried, the harder you flopped; you worked and spent nothing, and now in the end you have nothing." Another was as descriptive of the same events: "After all, we lost little. Louise and I started with next to nothing, we scraped and made something but spent more than the average, and now we are right back where we started."

The slowing up might from some points of view be a good thing. People are brought closer together in hard times and are better neighbors under stress and in common troubles. They have to learn to pioneer. They learn again what can be done without, and what can be made "as well" at home.

But what hurts is the persistence of the hard times. Certain items of food have to come from somewhere, and to come with some regularity; otherwise, the whole community suffers and goes down. Old coats can be worn for several winters, but now even these are falling to pieces. Shoes are a problem almost from the start, and we wonder that men and women are not commonly barefoot long before this. Dresses go down the line from bigger girls, from sisters and cousins, to littler ones; yet this process has limits, since the source of supply soon runs low. A woman has said, "We suffer at times for food, and we can't get clothes at all."

The very first law, now, has to be curtailment. No

spreading of sails; people must stay close to home. That is no absolute guarantee, but it is the only sort of promise and the only sort of insurance we can now have. To spend little, to make things at home, to provide on one's patch of ground nearly everything the family will eat and some things it will wear—this will not directly pay debts or taxes; but it is such protection as we can at present have.

Letters are the best record of people's interests, of their hopes and loves and fears. So we quote again from the lean humanist, and then from his wife. Of course, his letter shows him as he was, a man of the neighborhood, an Irish Iowan intimately concerned about his friends and people and with an indirect eye on the crops. And in this letter, as in his several letters and his speech, he is in many ways more than himself: he is the concentrated man of our time and our place. He writes:

June 4th 1933

Wednes day morring 8 o cock

Dear dauther lue and all

I received your letter and was glad ye are well as this leaves us at presant thank god the wether is very dry and all off the gardin Stuff is dried up oats all dried up and no Hay Pastures Would Burn no Potats and last week the Heat was 100 and over and Burned Every thing . . . i was at R Wallace funeral and it was the biggest i Ever Seen rose was thare But i was not talking too Her His Sister from Sioux City was thare mary and John . . .

i see lots from Melrose all with long faces in disPare

lue do not let my Boys out on Street alone as thares lots off kids getting killed with Cars do not let them one foot from you up town or at Croosings and keep your eye on them . . . i am pritty good at Presant thank god get Some disy spells Play uker Every after noon i would love to See Bille and John i get very lonsom when Some little Boys comes with a little wagon and Mike will run and smell off them as He uste off Bill and John and come back too mee as Hee seems to know . . . tell Billie and John that i will Send them Some ice cream mony for 4 off July iff i am a live and that i pray for them all day and at night and put the Sine of the

Cross on them and Say god Bless them . . . tell ted to Eat lots . . . Kathrin got a letter last week and Shee reads all Her letters too mee and i let Her read mine and it makes her Proud for you too Speak So good of Her . . . So goodBy all and as usal my too little Boys 1oooooooo Hugs and KKKKKK too them boys.

By good fortune we have also a couple of wonderful letters written by the lean humanist's wife to a married daughter the year (1903) the wife died. They tell not only about her but about him and the family and neighbors and times. The family and neighborhood, poor as they are—these are everything; as this man and woman and others would say: "God knows an' it's easy tellin'" that life, so united in the neighborhood and from great-grandfather to unborn child in the family, is rich and full of meaning. The woman writes:

Melrose iowa Aug 26

Dear Children Joe and Maggie

i receivd year letter yesterday and was glad to here yea were both well as this leaves us all at preasant i feele pretty well now. . . .

Kirk's little boy is better Rariden said he had spine trouble but the New Docter said he has rheumatism onley

Billie is a building a New house in town every boddie are gone to the fair at Desmoins this week Nick Kearns and Tom ohora¹ and frank and James Malone and Bush Ryan and pat mullin and all the Massmans and ulums and reps and allens and Martens and Batties and Dave sheppard and urfeey all drove in Covered waggons

Richards are a thrasing since the day be fore yesterday and will halve them untill Noone tomorrow . . . Mollie and Nonie are getting the Diner [at home] and it isn't like joes Diner it is potatoes and corn and corn and potatoes . . . kittie is a working at her rug and jamsie is gon to the sale to Caddies . . . Conways had a Dance a monday Night Mollie and kittie were there i halve 3 gallon jar of Cucumbers and a tub full and i can get a Bucket full every morning i will

¹ The Granger and Big Man; the Irish are named first, then the "Hoosiers over south."

give you al you want winnie Odea has 4 felows now she has Alphonse Pepper Nick Kearns big Tom Coners and Ned McCarty . . .

From mama or Mrs. James M

i sepose yea will think i am geting sillie

This poor Iowa-born woman, noted for policy, knew how to manage; she stayed close to home and never gave half an hour of her busy life to anything but the fully human. She says:

Melrose october 24

Dear Children i got year letter yesterday and was glad to hear yea were both well as this leaves us at presant i am feeling real well this week i maid a barrel of soap and a barrel of Crout this week and Notted a quilt and went to town and soad some on nell and Susie's Dresses all this week jimmie is husking corn and your paw is mooveing hay and wood al this week Martin knoles was married wensday and they just had a diner and went to Chicago thursday frank ohora is to be called tomorrow Cassie wants you to see mary and tell her to sind her mary's last winter hat with you and save her of buying johnies and micks were all down last Sunday and stayed all day ed mcgees are sawing wood to day
johnie B's foot is all right jimmie put him down in the pasture when yea left and kit drives may to school and what dou you think but magie sulivan or Car had twins tuesday night a boy and a girl and she was very bad she had to Docters and the priest and she was from one spasm to an other . . . i was up to connies the day of vugs sale . . . we are getting our carpet wove in iconium . . . what was the trouble with mary and lenia that they didnt get a long
mors stacton left melrose wensday and moved to kansas Richards is all well and mcgees are going to halve a dance saturday night

I was talking to john Bill mcgee he is just the saim john Bill . . . we saw jottie coming up on the train and he come right to our seat and talked to us to the town

year little pigs are big pigs now well i guess i cant think of any more to say so good by maggie and joe from

mama

Two excerpts from the lean humanist's letters conclude the evidence.

Satter day Augst td 11 1934

. . . i am Just onley as Comon the Hot wether was very Hard on me i Had too Stay in all the time . . . i am glad Ted is coming my Blader is not good and i Can not Eat very mutch and very weak . . . i feel mutch Better this morning thank God Kit come down one day last week . . . tim dailey is gone to bee Published too morrow too the wilson girl the oldest one and i do not know the date they will Bee marie and i think there is Some more not far off Closer relations But do not say so in writing too mee . . . Thomas Ahern is doctern for a fall He got and Hurt his nick . . . i like the cool wether and do not come after me on till i can Sleep in that middle room i do not want too keep yee out off year Bed . . . i did not play cards for 10 or 12 days too hot.

Oct 15 1931

Dear lue and all at melrose and Poor little Billy and J J Jon This is a german town and Pretty ded does not look like they doo very mutch Bissness . . . i went up town 3 or 4 times But Could not tell one word they Said you would think thare gees . . . i hope Billy and John is well and i want you too not let them get Hurt i am very lonsom for them my Sweet little kids . . .

well lue take good Care off the too boys . . . How is Al and let me know when you write How is Bisness

So good By All well Hear

i do not think i will go back this winter . . . tell Billie forde Helow and Jim Coughlin too Helow Jim and Ed mcgrauch Helow and Pat OConor and John Mahony Helow Boys.

That is the way people lived in 1900 and again thirty years later. As always, it is the family and the neighborhood that counts. And that is still true, but it is harder to say in these times what will be the possibility any longer of such an intimate and deeply human community.

To suffer for a few years—that is nothing; at least nothing serious; and it can be in many ways a blessing. But to go on suffering, with no way to get out—that is bad. The main resultant trouble is that people have lost property,

the actual possession of it or the hope of ever getting possession of it. To own something, even to hope to own something—that has always been the blood and bone of our community; that is what the grandfathers came to Iowa for, and it is only on such basis that our homelike and neighborly life is possible. The hope is taken away from us now. That is the tragic condition: insurance companies, usually far away, but near or far, insurance companies holding our property! How then on earth are we to reach again, in any form whatever, a community comparable to our old one? How are we to have stump men again coming to own and to be more or less secure, Mucks and Lettys with an opportunity, by work and endless care, to get their hands on land and to have their own home, lean humanists and their smart wives rearing families on poor rocky eighties that they call their own?

Not justice and fairness, not purity, not faith in God and in man—important as they are—not any of these is our problem. But ownership, the chance for ownership, and the freedom and security that come with ownership—that has become the problem on our hills in southern Iowa.

I used to think of our poor farmers as holding on to the sides of the hills, and scratching at the hills for a livelihood. Now, since that day in early June, their little world with its problems has turned upsidedown. I still see the men scratching away, but it is to support the hills and not the men. I seem to see men holding up the hills.

